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(2) scientific nomenclature under generic name only and following *The 'British Birds' List of Birds of the Western Palearctic* (1997), but with the modifications set out in *Brit. Birds* 97: 2-5 and 110;

(3) authors of all papers, notes, reviews and letters, and photographers; papers and notes are referred to by their titles, other contributions as 'letter on', 'review of', etc.;

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The *Chalice* petrel revisited

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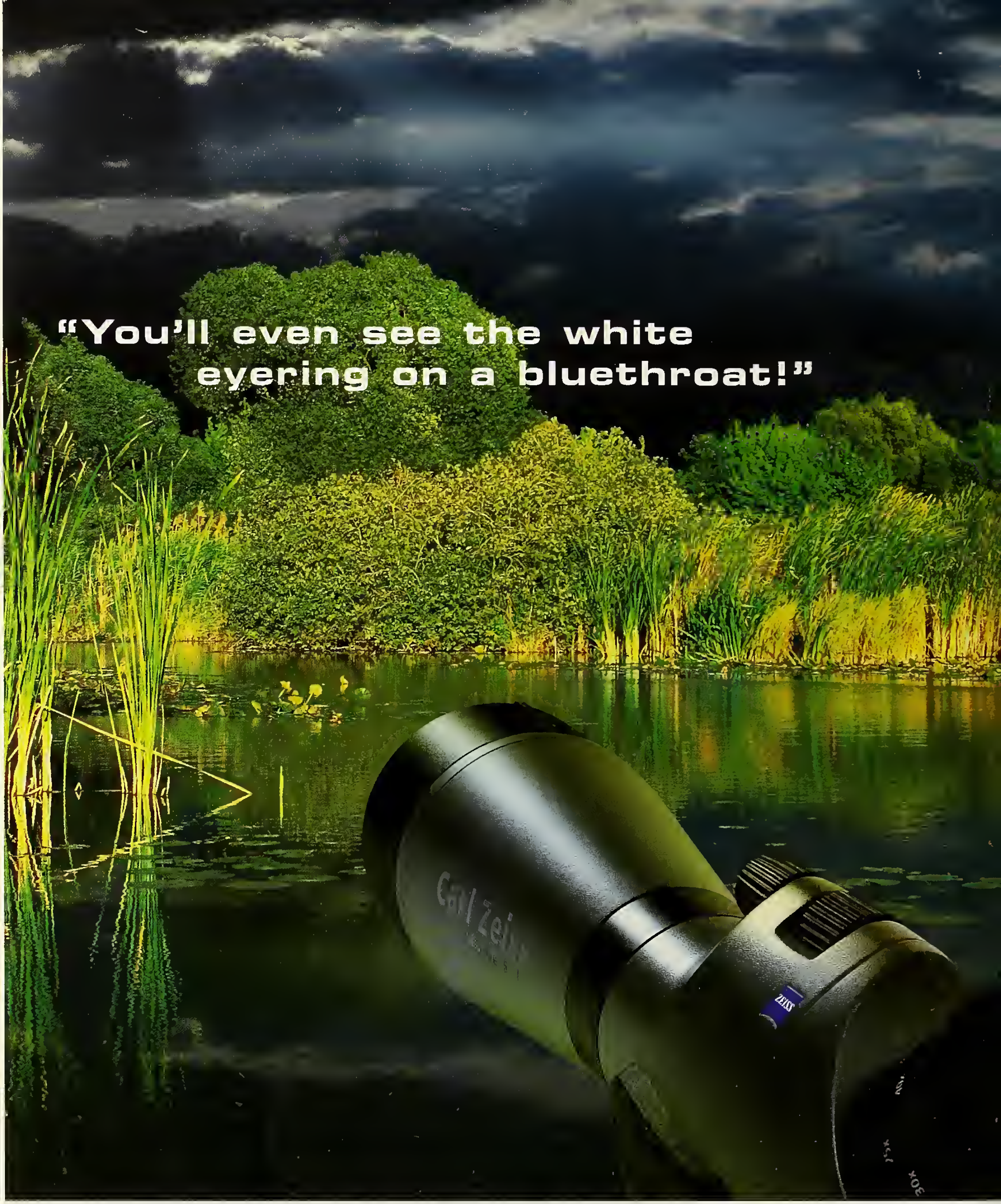

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Autumn raptor migration over Buskett, Malta

Michael Sammut and Edward Bonavia

ABSTRACT The wooded area of Buskett, on the western side of Malta, is situated on an important flyway for many raptors in the autumn, yet there are few published data on the numbers migrating over the area each year. Here, we present the results of autumn counts during 1998-2002 inclusive. These show that considerable numbers of raptors migrate through the site, and many use it for roosting purposes.

Towards the end of August, when hot and humid summer weather is still at its best, the first grey cumulus clouds start to form in the sky. It might not rain at all, but it heralds the beginning of the autumn raptor migration…

The Maltese Archipelago consists of a small group of islands in the central Mediterranean, situated some 89 km south of Sicily and 334 km north of Libya. In spring, many of the birds heading north from the North African coast, and funnelling through Cap Bon, in Tunisia, choose the route with the shortest sea crossing – this being towards the western coast of Sicily (146 km), from where most proceed farther north and east across the Strait of Messina. Situated well to the east of this direct route, the numbers of raptors migrating over Malta in spring are much lower than those observed at both the Strait of Messina and Cap Bon. In autumn, however, raptors converge over the eastern side of Sicily and fly along the east coast. Most of these will subsequently pass over Malta, since Malta is situated just to the west of a north-south line connecting Capo Passero, the southernmost point of Sicily, with the North African coast. Although the numbers of raptors crossing the central Mediterranean are not as large or impressive as those passing through the eastern and western parts of the Mediterranean, it is still an important migration flyway, especially for certain species. The Strait of Messina is the most important European migration flyway for Pallid *Circus macrourus* and Montagu's Harriers *C. pygargus*, Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonorae* and Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*, while for three other species (Marsh Harrier *C. aeruginosus*, Common Kestrel *F. tinnunculus* and Hobby *F. subbuteo*), the site is the most heavily used flyway within the Western Palearctic (Corso 2001).

In spring, raptors migrate over Malta on a broad front, generally from late February to mid May (sometimes into June), with peak passage between mid March and early May. Typically, the individual species peak at different times, and since the birds are often widely spread across the islands, it is extremely difficult to monitor migration from a single site. Autumn passage occurs from mid August to the end of October, with peak numbers between mid September (occasionally early September) and early October. Although still

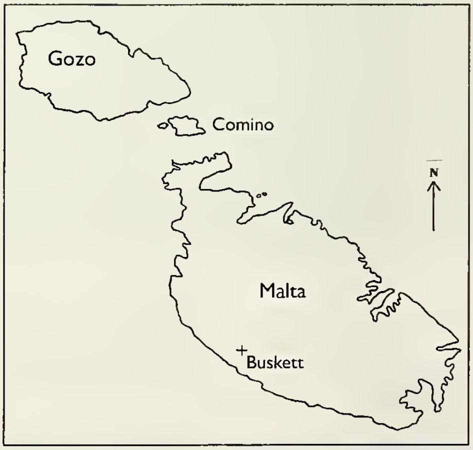

Fig. 1. Map showing location of the study site at Buskett, Malta.

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essentially a broad-front pattern, passage in autumn is more concentrated than in spring, especially as raptors converge on the wooded area of Buskett where many attempt to roost. This pattern makes monitoring more feasible.

Study area and methods

Buskett comprises a small wooded area and a valley, surrounded by hills, in the western part of the largest island of the archipelago (fig. 1). At 220 m above sea level it provides a fine view over the northern and eastern half of the island. It is one of the few wooded areas in the islands and is thus attractive to raptors, combining an area of relatively high land (ideal for the formations of thermals) with a sheltered and reasonably safe roosting place. The highest numbers of raptors are observed towards late afternoon, concentrating over the wooded areas as they attempt to find a roost site. Weather conditions greatly affect observations. Light winds are best, southwest being the optimum direction. Northern-quarter winds tend to be stronger than those from other directions and result in fewer birds, although Short-toed Eagles *Circaetus gallicus* are usually seen in northerly winds.

The data presented in table 1 were derived from systematic daily counts from mid August to late October during a five-year period, 1998-2002. Observations were carried out between 13.30 and 19.30 hrs, and in all weather conditions.

Raptors

A total of 24 species and one distinctive subspecies (Common Buzzard *B. buteo* of the race *vulpinus*, hereafter referred to as 'Steppe Buzzard') have been recorded at Buskett. Two of these are vagrants: Rough-legged Buzzard *B. lagopus* (a bird shot in 1956 is the only record of this species for Malta; de Lucca & de Lucca 1959) and Barbary Falcon *F. pelegrinoides*, of which one seen in 2002 will be the third record

Table 1. Totals of each raptor species counted at Buskett, Malta, during autumn migration 1998-2002.

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Totals
Honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus*	816	1,145	1,463	627	1,317	5,368
Black Kite *Milvus migrans*	20	18	22	23	27	110
Red Kite *Milvus milvus*					1	1
Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*		1				1
Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*	3	2	4	5	2	16
Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*	1,129	1,310	1,948	1,265	2,056	7,708
Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*	1			1	1	3
Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*				4	1	5
Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*	8	13	10	11	49	91
unidentified ringtail harrier *Circus*	13	8	14	2	10	47
Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*	2	5	5	4	14	30
Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*	3	4	11	9	6	33
'Steppe Buzzard' *Buteo buteo vulpinus*		1	2	2	1	6
unidentified broadwing sp.	107	46	64	22	11	250
Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*				5	1	6
Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus*		2	2		3	7
Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*	14	10	13	20	23	80
Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*	22	40	47	30	58	197
Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*	33	67	171	214	184	669
Lesser/Common Kestrel	37	51	42	7	17	154
Merlin *Falco columbarius*	1	2	1			4
Hobby *Falco subbuteo*	72	130	129	184	104	619
Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonorae*	1	13	16	12	12	54
Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug*				3		3
Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*		1			2	3
Barbary Falcon *Falco pelegrinoides*					1	1
unidentified falcon *Falco*	7	12	22	13	4	58
TOTALS	2,289	2,881	3,986	2,463	3,905	15,524

187. Honey-buzzards *Pernis apivorus*, Buskett, Malta, May 2003.

for Malta if accepted by the Maltese Rarities Committee. One other species, Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*, is also extremely rare, although a group of four adults and a juvenile seen on 13th October 2001 is the largest flock of this species ever recorded in the central Mediterranean in autumn.

The site is a major flyway for Honey-buzzards *Pernis apivorus*, Marsh Harriers, Common Kestrels and Hobbies. The most numerous species in autumn are Marsh Harrier (mean 1,542 individuals per autumn, range 1,129-2,056) and Honey-buzzard (mean 1,074, range 627-1,463); followed by Common Kestrel (mean 134, range 33-214) and Hobby (mean 124, range 72-184). Other species which are also recorded annually in relatively large numbers include Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*, Lesser Kestrel

188. Verdala Castle, which dominates the skyline of Buskett, on the western side of Malta, January 2004.

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189. Honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus*, Buskett, Malta, May 2002.

F. naumanni and Eleonora's Falcon.

Honey-buzzards, Marsh Harriers, Ospreys, Lesser Kestrels and Hobbies are seen throughout the whole autumn period, peaking on different dates from year to year. Adult Honey-buzzards migrate mainly in early September while juveniles (the majority of autumn migrants are juveniles) peak later in the month. Black Kites *Milvus migrans*, Montagu's Harriers and Eleonora's Falcons are seen mainly from the end of August to mid September, whereas Eurasian Sparrowhawks, Common Buzzards, Common Kestrels and the larger eagles are seen in mainly late September and October.

Overall, the number of raptors observed at Buskett has been increasing during our study period. This is due mainly to the numbers of Marsh Harriers, which have increased steadily during the recent years and now overtaken Honey-buzzard as the most numerous raptor observed. For example, during 1969-1973, total counts of autumn Marsh Harriers varied between eight and 80 (Beaman & Galea 1974). On 13th September 2002, no fewer than 1,014 were recorded over Buskett, the highest daily count yet recorded. The increased frequency of certain species, such as Pallid Harrier and Steppe Buzzard, can be attributed, at least in part, to improved field-identification skills and knowledge, together with better optical aids. On the other hand, species recorded more frequently in the past, like Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*, seem to have almost disappeared. This species' breeding population has declined considerably (Levy 1996), in Italy by 40-60% with now only about 15-17 breeding pairs left (Corso 2000). Most probably the ones recorded in Malta are from the Italian population.

As stated above, Buskett is of particular importance in providing the only relatively safe roosting place on the islands, particularly for Honey-buzzards and Marsh Harriers. An unusual roosting behaviour observed regularly at Buskett involves the latter species roosting in trees: single birds were first noted in 1981 (Balzan & Fenech 1981-83), while flocks of tree-roosting Marsh Harriers were first noted in 1991 (Mallia & Mangion 1991). On a few occasions in recent years, flocks of 150-200 Marsh Harriers have roosted in trees at Buskett, chiefly in Aleppo Pines *Pinus halepensis* and cypress *Cupressus* trees.

Owing to the numbers of other migrants present, particularly hirundines, the area is also frequently used as a hunting ground during migration. The key species are Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Common Kestrel, Hobby and Eleonora's Falcon. These species are frequently seen hunting small passerines and dragonflies (Odonata), while on one occasion, we observed an Eleonora's Falcon hunting pipistrelle bats *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*.

Conclusion

As the data in table 1 illustrate, Buskett is an important migration and roosting site for various raptor species during the autumn months. Unfortunately, owing to the lack of observers in our country, it is not possible to cover all potentially good sites for raptor migration, so the data in table 1 probably underestimate the true numbers of raptors passing through Malta in autumn. In addition, an unde-

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190. Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*, Buskett, Malta, date unknown.

termined number of raptors (sometimes relatively large numbers) migrate in the morning and are therefore not included in this paper.

The raptors attract not only birders but also poachers, and for many years an unbelievable massacre of raptors and other birds took place at Buskett, notwithstanding the fact that it is a bird sanctuary and thus no hunting is permitted. Consequently, every year, birdwatchers have been going to Buskett not only to watch, count and identify birds but also to protect them by establishing a presence and reporting any illegal activities. In recent years, this has been aided by frequent police patrols and by foreign activists who attend a raptor camp and has resulted in the lowest-ever numbers of raptors being shot within Buskett. Sadly, many raptors continue to be shot in the immediate surroundings and rest of the islands.

Acknowledgments

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Seabird distribution and oceanic upwelling off northwest Africa

Russell B. Wynn and Britta Knefelkamp

Long-tailed Skuas *Stercorarius longicaudus* and 'commic terns' *Sterna hirundo/paradisaea*. *Ray Scally*

ABSTRACT Large numbers of seabirds from northern Europe, including the UK, winter in a major zone of upwelling off northwest Africa. This area also attracts seabirds on migration to and from wintering areas farther south, as well as immature seabirds which are too young to breed. In spring 2003, the research ship R.V. *Meteor* visited this upwelling zone off Mauritania. The factors affecting seabird distribution in the region were assessed by comparing observational data on seabirds with a unique combination of other data from the study area. Fish, zooplankton and phytoplankton are concentrated along the shelf edge and upper slope where relatively cool, nutrient-rich, upwelled waters are brought to the surface, and the highest concentrations of seabirds are also found here. Although upwelling, and the associated concentration of food, appears to be the key control on seabird distribution, this pattern is complicated by human fishing activities, which are also concentrated around the shelf edge.

Introduction

Large numbers of seabirds from the UK, and elsewhere in Europe, spend the winter months feeding in areas of oceanic upwelling on the Atlantic margins of northwest and southwest Africa (Summerhayes *et al.* 1974; Cramp & Simmons 1977; Brown 1979; Furness 1987; Berruti *et al.* 1989; Marr & Porter 1992; Leopold 1993; Marr *et al.* 1998; Snow & Perrins 1998; Camphuysen 2002; Wernham *et al.* 2002; Wynn 2003) (fig. 1). Previous studies have investigated the general relationship between seabird distribution and upwelling associated with the Benguela Current off Namibia and South Africa (Summerhayes *et al.* 1974; Summerhayes 1976; Abrams 1983, 1985; Schneider & Duffy 1985; Berruti *et al.* 1989), but few studies have been carried out within the upwelling zone associated with the Canary Current off Mauritania and Senegal (Brown 1979; Leopold 1993; Camphuysen 2002). This latter region experiences the most intense and persistent oceanic upwelling in the Western Palearctic, making it an important wintering area for high-latitude breeding species such as Leach's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*, Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*, Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus* and Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* (Cramp & Simmons 1977; Furness 1987; Snow & Perrins 1998; Wernham *et al.* 2002). In addition, large numbers of immature skuas and terns spend one or more summers in this area until they reach breeding maturity, while in spring and autumn it is used as a feeding stop-over by migrating birds that winter farther south, such as Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus*, Sabine's Gull *Larus sabini* and Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* (Cramp & Simmons 1977; Lambert 1980; Furness 1987; Leopold 1993; Snow & Perrins 1998; Wernham *et al.* 2002).

Hunt (1990) stated that 'the ultimate goal of pelagic studies of marine birds is to understand the processes underlying the observed distribution and abundance of birds at sea. In the ideal study of seabirds at sea, we would like to simultaneously measure hydrographic structure and process, as well as the distribution and abun-

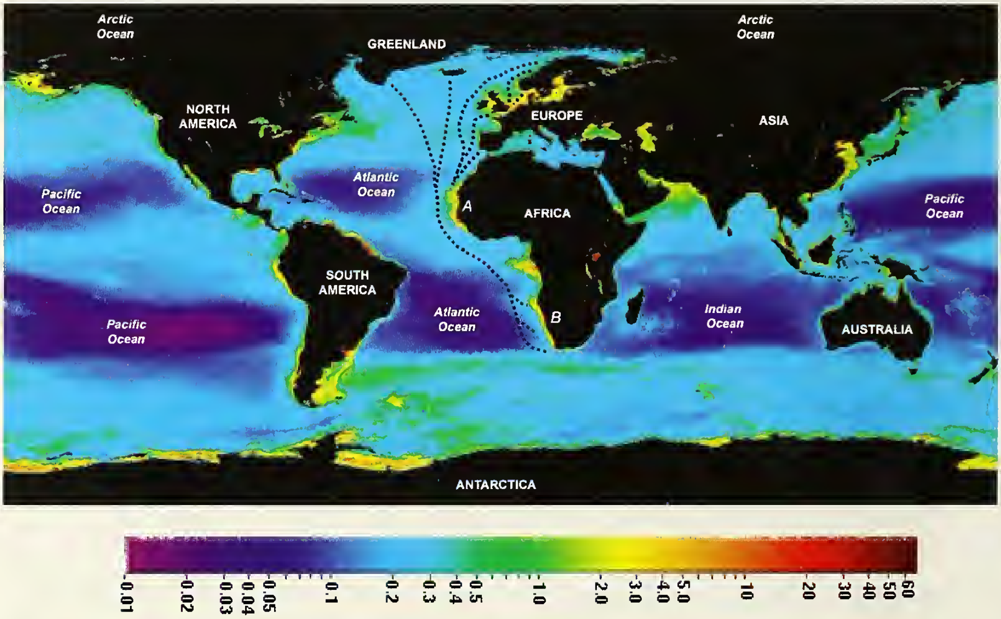

Fig. 1. SeaWiFS satellite composite image showing the global distribution of chlorophyll *a* concentration (in mg/m^3) in winter, 1998-2003. Warm colours (red, orange and yellow) equate to high concentrations, whereas cold colours (blue and purple) represent low concentrations, as shown in the key. Note the high chlorophyll *a* concentrations associated with the areas of upwelling off northwest Africa (A) and southwest Africa (B). The plume-like concentration off western central Africa is related to nutrient-rich sediment discharge from the Congo river, and is not related to upwelling. Note also that in shallow coastal waters suspended sediments can also generate bright colours and the data should be treated with care in these areas, e.g. the North and Baltic Seas. General pathways taken by breeding seabirds from northern Europe to their African wintering grounds are shown with a dashed black line. Raw image provided by the SeaWiFS Project, NASA/Goddard Space Flight Center and ORBIMAGE.

dance of both birds and their prey. Usually it is not possible to obtain a complete suite of these data.' As a result of technological advances, however, the integration of such data from various different sources is now a more realistic possibility, and that is what this study has attempted to do. During spring 2003, R. V. *Meteor* cruise M58/1 visited the upwelling zone off Mauritania from 21st April to 6th May. In this paper, we present an integrated, multidisciplinary dataset which has enabled us to take a unique 'snapshot' of the food web in the upwelling zone off Mauritania. Our main aims were as follows: 1) to illustrate why this region is so attractive to migrant seabirds from the UK and elsewhere in Europe, using 'state-of-the-art' satellite and other data; 2) to investigate the link between seabird distribution and upwelling-related concentrations of phytoplankton; and, 3) to build upon previous studies documenting the impressive spring migration of seabirds through this area.

Upwelling and phytoplankton off Mauritania

In simple terms, upwelling is driven by wind blowing on the surface waters of the ocean and creating currents. The earth's rotation means that water can actually be moved at a tangent to the direction the wind is blowing – a phenomenon known as the Coriolis effect. In the northern hemisphere, the Coriolis force drives ocean-surface currents to the *right* of the wind direction. Consequently, along the Mauritanian coast, which is aligned roughly north-south, the northeast trade winds tend to drive ocean-surface currents more to the west than the southwest. As these surface waters are pushed directly offshore, deeper water is drawn up from below to replace them. The upward movement of this deep, colder water is called upwelling.

The ecological effects of upwelling are quite diverse, but one impact is especially noteworthy. The cold, deep waters brought to the surface are rich in nutrients, leading to high phytoplankton concentrations. Phytoplankton is a collective term used to describe the single-celled microscopic algae which float in the well-illuminated surface and near-surface waters of the ocean. Like terrestrial plants, phytoplankton requires sunlight, water and nutrients for optimal growth. Because sunlight is most abundant near the sea surface, phytoplankton concentrates in the upper 200 m of the water column. Phytoplankton contains chlorophyll pigments, mostly in the form of chlorophyll *a*, which gives it a greenish colour.

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191. Immature Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus* harassing Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*, Mauritania, May 2003. Large numbers of immature skuas are thought to spend the summer months off northwest Africa, taking advantage of the rich feeding in this region.

When conditions are favourable for rapid growth, phytoplankton may become sufficiently concentrated to colour the sea and form a phytoplankton 'bloom' (fig. 2). Phytoplankton blooms form a major energy base for animal populations higher in the food chain, including zooplankton, fish, marine mammals, seabirds, and, ultimately, humans. Upwelling ecosystems with high phytoplankton concentrations, like those associated with the Canary, Benguela, California and Peru Currents, are some of the most productive ecosystems in the world (Brown 1979; Longhurst 1988), and support many of the world's most important fisheries. Consequently, they are also extremely important feeding areas for wintering, breeding and migrating seabirds.

Upwelling, and its associated high phytoplankton concentrations, is extremely variable in both space and time. For example, although the coastline off Mauritania experiences winds favourable to upwelling for most of the year, the strength, frequency and dynamics of the upwelling vary enormously (van Camp *et al.* 1991). This variability will directly affect the distribution of higher-order predators such as fish and seabirds; consequently, in years when upwelling is reduced it is likely that overall numbers of fish and seabirds will also be comparatively low (and vice versa). Unfortunately, recorded observations of seabirds in the deeper waters off Mauritania are sparse (Hazevoet 1985; Leopold 1993; Camphuysen 2002), although observations have been made farther south, off Senegal (e.g. Brown 1979, Marr & Porter 1992, Marr *et al.* 1998). Consequently, the relationship between seabirds and phytoplankton in this upwelling zone is poorly understood at present.

Sea surface temperature

Measurements of sea surface temperature (fig. 3) illustrate the concentration of relatively cool, upwelled water (<18°C) across the shelf and upper slope region off Mauritania. Warmer waters (>20°C), west of the 3,000-m depth contour, indicate the reduced effect of upwelling farther offshore. It is also notable that the influence of upwelling during spring is reduced to the north and south, off Western Sahara and Senegal respectively (fig. 3). This overall pattern of sea surface temperature is in agreement with that presented by Brown (1979) and Camphuysen (2002).

Phytoplankton distribution from satellite observations

A relatively new concept in marine science is the ability to obtain images of phytoplankton concentrations from space, using satellite imagery such as SeaWiFS (Sea-viewing Wide Field-of-view Sensor; fig. 4), which is operated by NASA (the North American Space Agency). This is possible because the colour of visible light that is radiated

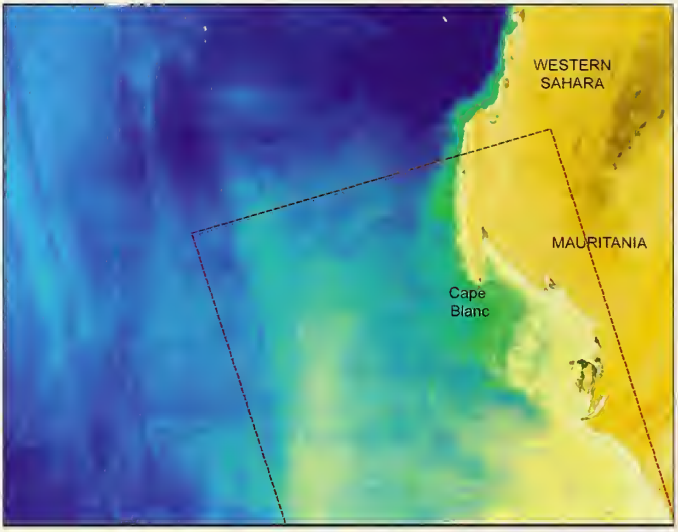


Fig. 2. MERIS (Medium Resolution Imaging Spectrometer) satellite photograph showing phytoplankton plumes (pale colours) in the high productivity zone offshore Mauritania on 28th March 2002. Deep blue colours in the northern and southwestern sections of the image indicate low phytoplankton concentrations in these areas. Note that pure white areas adjacent to the coast also represent suspended sediments in the water. The study area for this paper (figs. 6 and 7) is shown by a dashed red box. Raw image provided by the European Space Agency.

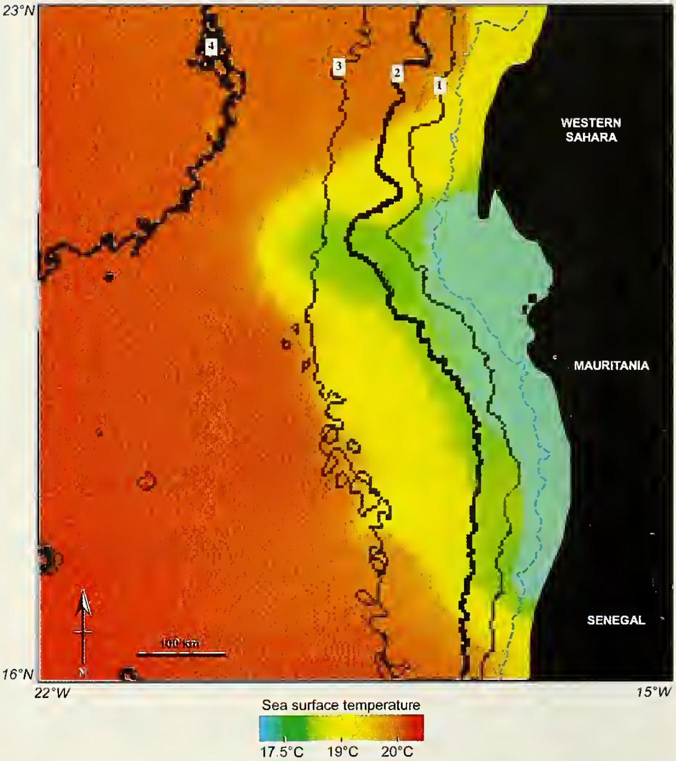


Fig. 3. Map of the study area showing the general pattern of sea surface temperature. This map contains ship-based (measured) records from the R.V. *Meteor* cruise in April-May 2003, combined with regional average values.

and/or reflected by the sea varies with the concentration of chlorophyll *a* and other plant pigments present in the water (see Longhurst 1988, Pedersen 1990 and van Camp *et al.* 1991 for overviews of this topic). In general, higher phytoplankton concentrations lead to higher concentrations of plant pigments, making the water appear more intensely coloured (fig. 2). Since an Earth-orbiting sensor can view every square kilometre of cloud-free ocean every 48 hours, satellite-acquired ocean colour data constitute a valuable tool for determining the abundance of phytoplankton on both a global and a local scale (fig. 1).

SeaWiFS images were obtained from the Mauritania upwelling zone for the period corresponding with the *Meteor* cruise. Fig. 4 shows a single composite image covering the entire period from 15th April to 16th May 2003, and clearly illustrates the regional pattern of phytoplankton (chlorophyll *a*) distribution at this time. High phytoplankton concentrations (displayed in warm colours, i.e. red, orange and yellow) are mostly found where the coastline is aligned north-south and the prevailing north-east trade winds (combined with Coriolis forces) push surface waters directly offshore, leading to upwelling of relatively cold, deep, nutrient-rich waters. Farther north and south, the morphological and oceanographic conditions are different, and upwelling does not occur or is greatly reduced. Another obvious feature in fig. 4 is the concentration of the highest phytoplankton values close to the coast and in inshore waters. Farther offshore, phytoplankton concentrations are much lower (shown in cold colours, i.e. blue and purple), for example over the deep basins west of the Canary Islands.

Another set of more detailed SeaWiFS images covers the three one-week intervals from 15th April to 8th May (fig. 5). Unfortunately, owing to a combination of cloud cover and wind-blown atmospheric dust, the image quality deteriorates in late April and early May. Nonetheless, variations in phytoplankton concentration within the study area during the first two weeks are visible, with a clear increase over the shelf and upper slope between 18°N and 20°N during the second week.

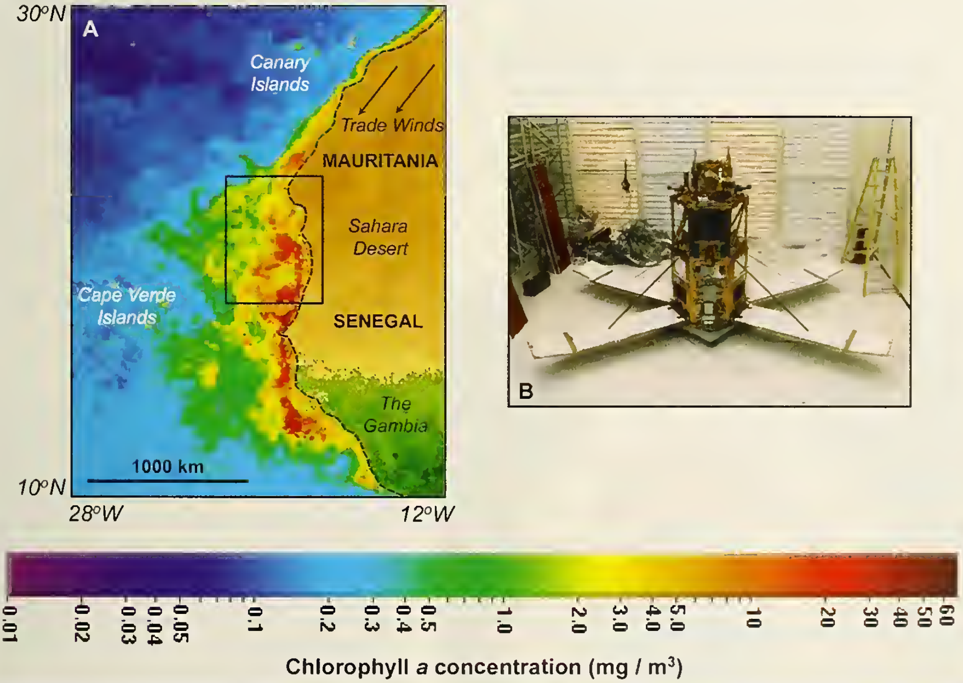


Fig. 4. (A) SeaWiFS satellite composite image showing chlorophyll *a* distribution (in mg/m^3) off northwest Africa from 15th April to 16th May 2003. Note the spatial variability in chlorophyll *a* concentration, with high values (red, orange and yellow colours) restricted to the upwelling zone off Mauritania and Senegal and low values (blue colours) in the deep ocean further offshore. Black rectangle delimits the study area as shown in figs. 5-7. Black dashed line represents the coast. (B) Photo showing the SeaStar spacecraft, with the SeaWiFS instrument on the top. Raw images provided by the SeaWiFS Project, NASA/Goddard Space Flight Center and ORBIMAGE.

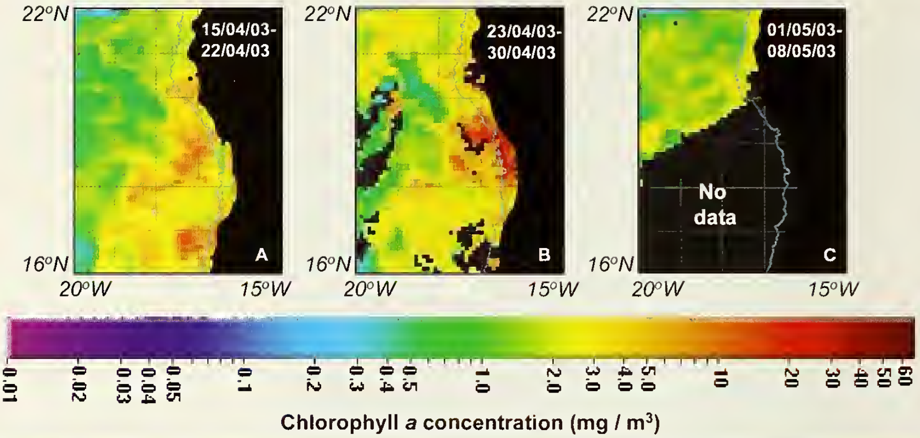
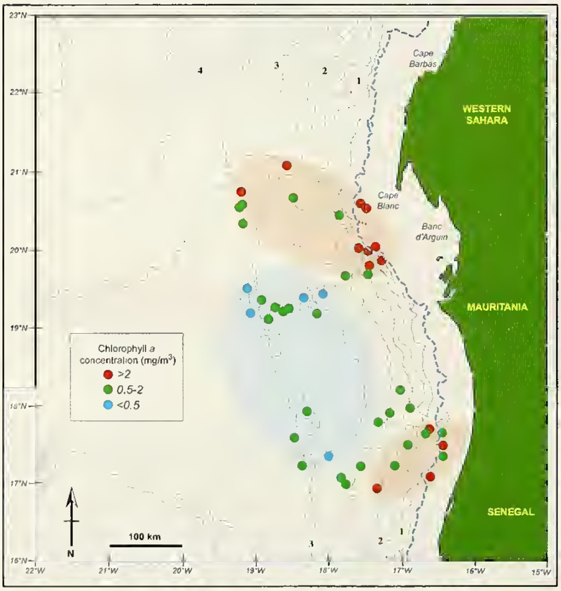


Fig. 5. SeaWiFS satellite images showing chlorophyll *a* distribution (in mg/m^3) in the study area in three one-week intervals from 15th April to 8th May 2003. Note that the highest chlorophyll *a* concentrations (red and orange colours) are generally restricted to the inshore waters east of the 18°W line of longitude. Note also the spatial and temporal changes in chlorophyll *a* concentration over a period of a few days (images A and B). Land is shown in black and the shelf edge is marked by a dashed blue line. Dark areas offshore in images B and C represent pixels of no data due to large amounts of atmospheric dust and cloud at that time. Raw images provided by the SeaWiFS Project, NASA/Goddard Space Flight Center and ORBIMAGE.

Phytoplankton distribution from direct measurements

Phytoplankton samples were recovered from surface waters at several locations within the study area (fig. 6). These were subsequently processed at the Alfred-Wegener-Institute Foundation for Polar and Marine Research, to determine chlorophyll *a* concentrations in each sample. These samples confirm that areas of high concentration (>2 mg/m^3) are generally located around the outer shelf and upper slope, whereas areas of low concentration (<0.5 mg/m^3) are located in deeper water, beyond the 2,500-m depth contour and west of 18°W (fig. 6). This distribution roughly correlates with satellite measurements of surface chlorophyll *a* concentration taken during the cruise period, and the actual measured values obtained by both methods are also comparable (figs. 4 & 6).



Fish distribution from Parasound seismic profiles

During the *Meteor* cruise, continuous shallow seismic profiles were collected to analyse the structure of sediments below the seafloor. This equipment can, however, also obtain images of fish shoals, both in shallow water near the surface and in deeper water near the seabed. The limitations of the equipment are that: 1) only shoals which

Fig. 6. Map of the study area showing distribution of surface phytoplankton (chlorophyll *a*) concentration. Red circles represent surface water samples where concentrations were measured at >2 mg/m^3. Green circles represent concentrations of 0.5-2 mg/m^3 and blue circles represent concentrations of <0.5 mg/m^3. Pink ovals delimit zones of relatively high phytoplankton concentrations while the pale blue oval delimits the area of relatively low concentrations. Shelf edge is represented by a thick blue dashed line and ship tracks are shown by thin dashed green lines. Land is solid green. Bathymetric contours (thin black lines) are in km.

were <200 m above the seabed could be recorded; 2) recordings do not extend into the upper few metres of the water column; and 3) fish shoals have to be relatively large and tightly packed, which becomes more crucial in deeper water as signal strength weakens.

During the cruise, the only large fish shoals noted were around the shelf edge at <200 m water depth (fig. 7). The distribution of these large shoals was not uniform, however; few were recorded around the rugged topography of canyon heads and most were observed on flat sections of the outer shelf and upper slope. Large shoals of this size and density should also be identifiable near the seabed in deeper water, but none was seen away from the shelf edge. It is possible that in deeper water the only large fish shoals present would be in the pelagic zone, well above the seabed, and therefore outside the Parasound image window. Nonetheless, most of the shoals noted around the shelf edge were concentrated near the seabed (fig. 8). The Parasound data fit well with the observations of human fishing activity, which was concentrated around the shelf edge and absent in areas of deeper water. As would be expected, the distribution of large fish shoals occurs within areas of high primary productivity, as confirmed by satellite images (figs. 4 and 5) and direct measurements (fig. 6). Although the observed fish shoals were near the seabed during the time of the survey, and therefore apparently unrelated to phytoplankton concentrations higher in the water column, it should be remembered that many species of shoaling fish (and cephalopods) feed in surface waters only at night. Unfortunately, the shoals (fig. 8) were recorded only in daylight hours, so this could not be tested directly.

Russell Wynn

192. Adult Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus*, Mauritania, May 2003. Flocks of up to 30 Pomarine Skuas were seen in the study area during the R.V. *Meteor* cruise, with many adult birds still migrating north as late as early May.

Zooplankton and fish distribution from direct measurements

Zooplankton are small planktonic animals that graze on phytoplankton; they float (or swim weakly) in the water column and drift around on ocean currents. Brown (1979) calculated zooplankton and fish weights from the Senegal

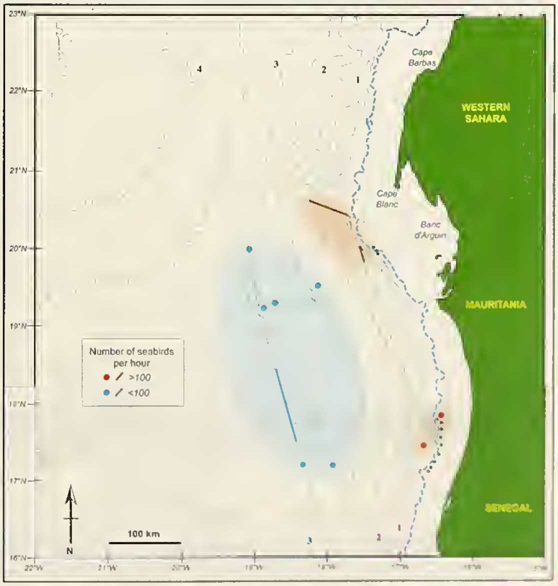


Fig. 7. Map of the study area showing distribution of seabirds and large fish shoals during the R.V. *Meteor* cruise between 21st April and 6th May 2003. Seabird observations during passage are shown by solid red or blue lines, while observations 'on station' are represented by red or blue dots. Red dots/lines indicate locations where large numbers of seabirds were noted (>100 per hour of observation). Blue dots/lines indicate areas with few seabirds (<10 per hour). Pink ovals delimit the inshore zones with >100 birds per hour and the pale blue oval delimits the offshore zone with <100 birds per hour. Note the close correlation with areas of high and low phytoplankton concentrations as shown in fig. 6. Small black dots show locations of large fish shoals observed on Parasound profiles. Bathymetry and layout as fig. 6.

margin immediately south of our study area (between 11°N and 18°N). These data were collected in February and March 1976. Although not directly linked to this study, Brown's results contribute to the overall picture by adding information on direct measurements of both zooplankton and fish in the region (which were not sampled during the *Meteor* cruise). Brown found that the highest concentrations of both zooplankton and fish were found in areas east of 18°W-19°W. These findings correspond well with the phytoplankton and fish data collected during our study (figs. 5-7), with higher concentrations over the shelf and upper slope east of 18°W, and lower concentrations farther offshore.

Seabird observations and distribution

Some northern hemisphere seabirds, such as Grey Phalarope and Pomarine Skua, preferentially spend the winter off northwest Africa and generally do not travel farther south. Sample counts of these two species have exceeded 2,500 in this region between January and March (Brown 1979; Camphuysen 2002). Many other northern hemisphere species, such as Arctic *Stercorarius parasiticus* and Long-tailed Skuas, Sabine's Gull and Black Tern, winter in larger numbers farther south, in the Benguela upwelling region, and pass through the waters off Senegal and Mauritania only in April-May (and also in autumn). Comparable counts of these species have failed to exceed 200 off northwest Africa between January and March (Brown 1979; Camphuysen 2002).

Sporadic and opportunistic seabird observations were made almost daily during the *Meteor* cruise, although the time spent watching varied, and we did not differentiate between periods when the ship was stationary or on passage. Consequently, our observations are at best 'semi-quantitative' and, although counts of all species were recorded, the variability of observations means that they should be used only in a simplistic fashion.

In total, about 20 species of seabirds were observed more than 50 km from the coast (table 1). Of these, Royal Tern *Sterna maxima* is the only species which breeds locally in large numbers, with a significant population at the Banc d'Arguin (Leopold 1993; Snow & Perrins 1998). All the other species breed farther afield, with the majority coming from northwest Europe, Iceland or Arctic Russia (Cramp & Simmons 1977; Snow & Perrins 1998; Wernham *et al.* 2002), although some originate from the Mediterranean Sea (e.g. Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*), North Atlantic islands such as the Azores and Canary Islands (e.g. Madeiran Storm-petrel *O. castro*, Cory's Shearwater and Roseate Tern *S. dougallii*), Greenland/Canada (Sabine's Gull and Arctic Tern *S. paradisaea*) and the South Atlantic/Pacific Oceans (Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus* and Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*).

The number of species recorded is comparable with previous observations in the region during spring (Marr & Porter 1992; Leopold 1993; Marr *et al.* 1998). Given the semi-quantitative nature of the data, we have classified abundance using four simple groupings (table 1). This reveals that the most common species

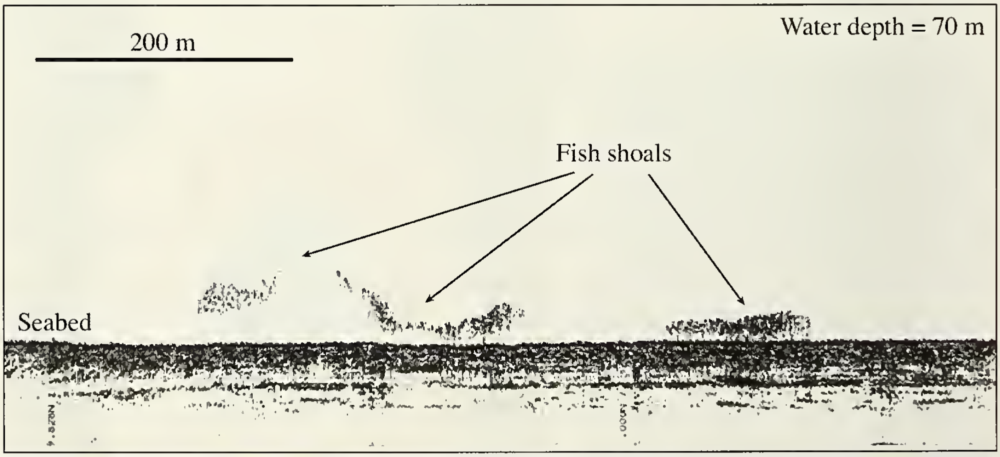


Fig. 8. Parasound seismic profile showing large fish shoals near the seabed on the outer continental shelf at about 20°N in a water depth of approximately 70 m.

Table 1. List of seabirds observed >50 km from land during the R.V. *Meteor* cruise off Mauritania from 21st April to 6th May 2003. 'Total numbers' refers to the estimated total number of individuals seen during the cruise. 'Origin' describes the general breeding range of each species (Cramp & Simmons 1977; Snow & Perrins 1998; Wernham *et al.* 2002).

Species	Total numbers	Origin
Sabine's Gull *Larus sabini*	>1,000	Greenland, Canada
Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*	>1,000	Europe, Russia
Common/Arctic Tern *Sterna hirundo/paradisaea*	>1,000	Europe, Arctic Russia, Greenland, Canada
Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*	100-1,000	Mediterranean Sea, East Atlantic islands
Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*	100-1,000	Southern Ocean, Antarctica
Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus*	100-1,000	Arctic Russia
Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus*	100-1,000	Northern Europe, Arctic Russia
European Storm-petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*	10-100	Northwest Europe
Madeiran Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma castro*	10-100	East Atlantic Islands
Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*	10-100	Northwest Europe
Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*	10-100	Northern Europe, Arctic Russia
Royal Tern *Sterna maxima*	10-100	Mauritania (Banc d'Arguin)
Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*	10-100	Northern & western Europe
Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus*	<10	South Atlantic & South Pacific Oceans
Leach's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*	<10	Northwest Europe, Canada
Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*	<10	Greenland, Iceland, Arctic Ocean
Great Skua *Stercorarius skua*	<10	Northwest Europe
Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*	<10	Northern & western Europe
Yellow-legged Gull *Larus cachinnans*	<10	Southern Europe, North Africa, East Atlantic islands
Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii*	<10	UK, France, Azores

(>1,000 individuals recorded) were Sabine's Gull, Black Tern and Common/Arctic Terns *S. hirundo/paradisaea* ('commic' terns), with large numbers (100-1,000) of Cory's Shearwaters, Wilson's Storm-petrels, Pomarine Skuas and Long-tailed Skuas. Smaller numbers (10-100) of European Storm-petrels *Hydrobates pelagicus*, Madeiran Storm-petrels, Northern Gannets *Morus bassanus*, Arctic Skuas, Royal Terns and Sandwich Terns *S. sandvicensis* were also recorded, while sightings of Sooty Shearwaters, Leach's Storm-petrels, Grey Phalaropes, Great Skuas *Stercorarius skua*, Lesser Black-backed Gulls *L. fuscus*, Yellow-legged Gulls *L. cachinnans* and Roseate Terns did not reach double figures. The spatial pattern of the seabirds we observed has also been plotted in a simplistic fashion, with just two categories recognised: more than or less than 100 seabirds observed per hour. This simple subdivision effectively delimits two zones, which are roughly divided by the 18°W line of longitude (fig. 7).

The offshore zone (<100 birds per hour)

This zone is generally characterised by water depths of more than 2,500 m and is over 150 km from land. It corresponds with the lower continental slope and upper continental rise. Observations were made within this zone over an area of about 17,000 km^2 between latitudes 17°N and 20°N (fig. 7). Seabirds were scarce in this region, and only seven species were seen. Of these, Grey Phalarope was the only species observed solely in the offshore zone, with about eight seen between 22nd April and 5th May. The highly pelagic nature of this species off Mauritania in spring is emphasised by the fact that Leopold (1993) saw none off the Banc d'Arguin during 10th-29th May 1988 in an area <100 km offshore and generally <500 m water depth. Brown (1979) noted that Grey Phalaropes were virtually confined to a relatively narrow band, about 100-300 km from land, in his survey during January-March 1976, between 11°N and 18°N. In this area, zooplankton were concentrated at the surface in 'streaks' of calmer water, and the largest observed flock of Grey Phalaropes was feeding at one such slick.

The other species observed regularly in the offshore zone (including Pomarine Skua, Arctic Tern and Black Tern) all seemed to be adults on northward migration, except for a handful of feeding European Storm-petrels. In addition, single Leach's and European Storm-petrels were found on the deck of the ship after being dazzled by the vessel's lights at night (plate 193). The presence of small numbers of Arctic Terns moving north through the offshore zone, yet no Common or Sandwich Terns, is probably a reflection of the more pelagic habits of Arctic Tern.

The inshore zone (>100 birds per hour)

This zone is generally characterised by water depths of less than 2,000 m and is within 100 km of land. This corresponds with the outer edge of the continental shelf and the upper part of the continental slope. Observations were made within this zone in two areas, off the Banc d'Arguin, between 20°N and 20°30'N, and farther south, near the Mauritania/Senegal border, between 17°30'N and 18°N (fig. 7). Large numbers of seabirds were seen in both areas during the 2003 *Meteor* cruise. In general, most of the adult skuas, terns and Sabine's Gulls were moving north on migration, while most of the immatures of these species, as well as Wilson's Storm-petrels and immature Northern Gannets and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, were moving in more random directions or not at all. This is to be expected, as many of these immatures remain in the region throughout the summer months (Leopold 1993; Snow & Perrins 1998; Wernham *et al.* 2002). As we discuss later, however, this general pattern was greatly affected by external factors such as human fishing activities.

Although many of the observed seabird species breed in northwest Europe, it was Pomarine and Long-tailed Skuas and Black Terns which were seen moving north in adult plumage in the largest numbers, even as late as early May. In contrast, Arctic Skuas and 'commic' terns were generally seen feeding and loafing around fishing boats, and the majority were in immature plumage, suggesting that most adults had already left their wintering grounds. This fits well with their respective peak passage periods through the English Channel and North Sea, with Arctic Skuas and 'commic' terns generally peaking in the last week of April and first week of May, and the other three species peaking slightly later, between early May and early June (Furness 1987; Snow & Perrins 1998; Wernham *et al.* 2002).

We believe that the four large (formerly '*Catharacta*') skuas seen during the spring 2003 cruise showed features consistent with Great Skua. In addition, during April 1992, the only three large skuas recorded by Marr & Porter (1992) off Senegal were also thought to be Great Skuas. Ringing records have revealed that small numbers of immature Great Skuas do travel as far south as Senegal in winter (Wernham *et al.* 2002), and the presence of wintering adult Great Skuas in the region has recently been proven by satellite-tracking. For example, three of 11 satellite-tracked adult (eight years or older) Great Skuas trapped at the nest on Foula, Shetland, subsequently visited the sea area between Morocco and Mauritania during the winter of 2002/03 (R. W. Furness *in litt.*). In contrast, Marr *et al.* (1998) suggested that all of the 500 large skuas recorded off Senegal in October 1995, 1996 and 1997 were South Polar Skuas *S. maccormicki* (although the identification of these birds is still under debate, and it has been suggested that some may even be Brown Skuas *S. antarctica*; R. Newell *pers. comm.*). In addition, Camphuysen (2002) found a single South Polar Skua off Western Sahara in January 2000, although Great Skuas were the more abundant species overall. Recent reports of immature Brown Skuas in southwest Britain in October 2001 (Scott 2002) and February 2002 (Moon & Carrington 2002) indicate that large skuas from the southern oceans may occur in the North Atlantic during autumn and winter, suggesting that the influx of birds off Senegal in late autumn involves some from this region. Nonetheless, further observations in the area are clearly required.

External factors influencing seabird distribution in the study area

In this study, we have attempted to investigate how the distribution of seabirds is influenced by the location of upwelling-related phytoplankton concentrations. In addition, we have to recognise other factors which may be of equal, or even greater, importance in affecting seabird distribution, including migration routes and interactions with human fishing activities.

Migration routes

The majority of birds in our study area were migrating north. Previous observations farther south also provide some indication of the scale of this passage. For example, during 21st-28th

April 1992, observations from land, or at sea within 25 km of the coast near Dakar, Senegal, produced totals of 340 Cory's Shearwaters, 1,259 Wilson's Storm-petrels, 769 Pomarine Skuas, 27 Long-tailed Skuas, 242 Sabine's Gulls, 96 Roseate Terns and thousands of Black, Common and Arctic Terns moving north (Marr & Porter 1992; Marr *et al.* 1998). Leopold (1993) also noted that many of the species recorded off the Banc d'Arguin during 10th-29th May 1988 were migrating north.

Given a homogeneous expanse of ocean, and assuming that weather conditions could be held constant, most birds would be expected to migrate across a broad front, with some concentration at coastal promontories and narrow passages. Our observations, and those of Leopold (1993) suggest, however, that the northward migration of many species off Mauritania is concentrated along the shelf edge, with fewer birds noted more than 150 km offshore. Similar findings, relating to both migrating and non-migrating seabirds, were recorded from the upwelling zone off southwest Africa by Summerhayes *et al.* (1974). The majority of non-migrating immatures were also concentrated along the shelf edge (Leopold 1993; this study), suggesting that, in this region, factors such as ocean hydrography and/or food availability control the migration route rather than coastline morphology or meteorological conditions. Farther north, e.g. in the shallow waters of the English Channel and North Sea, seabird migration routes are probably more heavily influenced by coastlines and weather.

Britta Knefelkamp

193. Leach's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*, Mauritania, May 2003. This bird was found fluttering about inside a laboratory after becoming dazzled by the ship's lights at night. A European Storm-petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus* was also caught in this way.

Human fishing activities

We found that large numbers of seabirds were congregating around fishing boats on the outer shelf and shelf edge, something noted previously in this region by Brown (1979), Leopold (1993), Marr *et al.* (1998) and Camphuysen (2002). Assessing how much these birds rely on discarded fish offal as a food source is difficult, and almost certainly varies among species. Leopold (1993) concluded that 'trawlers had a profound effect on the distribution of seabirds, masking any effects of a hydrographical nature... most of the larger birds seen during this survey were strongly attracted to the trawlers in the area, rendering any analysis of distribution patterns in relation to hydrography senseless'. Nonetheless, Leopold (1993) also presented clear evidence that some species, e.g. storm-petrels, were feeding on 'a variety of food, both natural and supplied by man'. Our study provides an opportunity to assess seabird distribution across a larger geographical area, extending offshore away from the zone of trawler activity, and we also have the benefit of additional data such as phytoplankton distribution. We suggest that although the presence of fishing boats does affect seabird distribution in our study area, it is but one part of a larger food web. Summerhayes *et al.* (1974) also noted that seabirds over the southwest African upwelling were consistently concentrated around the shelf edge 'regardless of the incidence of favoured trawling grounds or the level of fishing activity'.

Conclusions and further research

This study has revealed that the distribution of phytoplankton, fish, seabirds and human fishing activities off northwest Africa can be roughly subdivided into two distinct zones:

The *offshore zone* represents deep water beyond the 2,500-m depth contour, roughly west of 18°W, and is characterised by relatively warm (>20°C) surface waters not influenced by upwelling (fig. 3), low phytoplankton concentrations as measured by satellite imagery and direct sampling (figs. 5 and 6), low zooplankton and fish concentrations as measured by direct sampling (Brown 1979), no large fish shoals on seismic profiles (fig. 7), few observations of fishing boats, and low numbers (<100 per hour) of migrating and non-migrating seabirds (fig. 7) with a restricted range of species.

The *inshore zone* is centred on the shallower waters of the upper slope and outer shelf, east of 18°W, and is characterised by relatively cool (<18°C) upwelled surface waters (fig. 3), high phytoplankton (figs. 5 and 6), zooplankton and fish concentrations (Brown 1979), scattered large fish shoals (fig. 7), abundant fishing boats, and large numbers (>100 per hour) of migrating and non-migrating seabirds (fig. 7) with a wide range of species.

The clear division between biota-rich and biota-poor waters, at roughly 18°W, was also noted by Brown (1979) between 11°N and 18°N off Senegal, while Camphuysen (2002) concluded that much higher densities of seabirds were present over the shelf and shelf-edge off Mauritania in January 2000 compared with the open ocean.

It appears that upwelling exerts a primary control on the marine food web off northwest Africa. Upwelling leads to high phytoplankton concentrations which provides a food base for organisms such as zooplankton, pelagic crustaceans, cephalopods and fish. These in turn provide food for seabirds and humans. Seabirds are concentrated in these upwelling regions along the shelf edge and upper slope, the inshore zone.

Seabird distribution off Mauritania is clearly influenced by the presence of human fishing activities which are also drawn to the high densities of fish in the area. Even without the discards available from fishing boats, however, we suggest that seabird concentrations would remain high in the inshore zone, as this marks a concentration of natural food compared with areas farther offshore, and also inshore areas farther north and south along the margin.

To build upon the above conclusions it is clear that we need to: 1) better understand exactly how fishing fleets influence seabird distribution off northwest Africa; 2) assess which species are most affected; and, 3) investigate whether changes in human fishing activities will benefit or disrupt seabirds using the area. Further studies of seabirds in the upwelling zone off northwest Africa are also required to assess the nature of the interchange between this zone and the comparatively well-studied Benguela upwelling zone off southwest Africa.

Further afield, this study has illustrated the benefits of applying satellite-based data to seabird studies. A new study is already under way to investigate the relationship between the sporadic late summer/early autumn phytoplankton blooms observed via satellites over the UK Southwest Approaches, and the large fluctuations in numbers of Balearic Shearwaters *Puffinus mauretanicus* recorded from the adjacent coastlines of southern England and Wales in recent years.

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A critical look at the evidence relating to 'the *Chalice* petrel'

Martin Garner and Killian Mullarney

ABSTRACT This paper presents a critical review of the field evidence relating to a record of a dark-rumped storm-petrel *Oceanodroma*, seen from the M.V. *Chalice*, southwest of Scilly, on 3rd August 1988 ('the *Chalice* petrel'). We contend that a critical misjudgment of the size of the *Chalice* petrel has seriously hampered the subsequent debate about its identity, and that it can, in fact, be shown to be approximately the same size as a Leach's Storm-petrel *O. leucorhoa*. It seems likely that the unfamiliar flight action of the mystery petrel may have contributed significantly to the impression of a larger-looking seabird, as well as the fact that it was being compared directly with the much smaller European Storm-petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*. Its size and other features are discussed here, together with a subsequent and well-documented record of a Swinhoe's Storm-petrel *O. monorhis*, seen from a boat in the western North Atlantic. Given the North Atlantic context of the *Chalice* petrel, we believe that the evidence points to it having been a Swinhoe's Storm-petrel.

Many long-standing readers of *British Birds*, and others with an interest in rare birds in Britain, will no doubt recall the intriguing case of a dark-rumped *Oceanodroma* petrel seen and photographed in the Western Approaches on 3rd August 1988, which subsequently became known as 'the *Chalice* petrel' after the name of the vessel from which it was observed. The identification of this bird was discussed in detail in three related contributions, published in the August 1997 issue of *BB* (Force 1997; Hume *et al.* 1997; Young & King 1997). In spite of the fact that the bird was observed for over ten minutes at ranges down to 20 m by a dozen observers (two of whom managed to obtain vitally important record photographs), the identification was deemed inconclusive by BBRC.

Although this observation involved the first 'dark-rumped *Oceanodroma* petrel' in the North Atlantic to make headlines in the popular birding press (Gantlett 1988), it was preceded by two less well publicised, but even more intriguing records of unidentified dark-rumped *Oceanodroma* petrels, heard calling on the island of Selvagem Grande, south of Madeira, in July 1983 and July 1988 (Bretagnolle *et al.* 1991). These two individuals, both trapped, together with others trapped in Tynemouth, Tyne & Wear, in 1989-1994 (three individuals; Cubitt 1995); Brittany, France, in July 1989 (Bretagnolle *et al.* 1991); and off Benidorm, Spain (King & Minguez 1994), represented one of the most extraordinary and exciting developments in rare seabird recording in the Western Palearctic for decades.

Although the Tynemouth birds were suspected as being Swinhoe's Storm-petrels *O. monorhis* from an early stage (Carruthers *et al.* 1989), it took three years of painstaking and thorough research to demonstrate this conclusively (Bretagnolle *et al.* 1991; Cubitt *et al.* 1992; Cubitt 1995). Naturally, as it became clear that Swinhoe's Storm-petrels were indeed present in the North Atlantic, many people, including us, suspected that the *Chalice* petrel was also likely to have been a Swinhoe's. It was with great interest, therefore, that we (independently) studied the above-mentioned articles, which presented substantially more of the evidence relating to the *Chalice* petrel than had been available previously, and which would have been prepared in the light of multiple records of Swinhoe's Storm-petrel in the region. In their introductory paragraphs, Young & King (1997) acknowledged that the prevailing view – that the *Chalice* petrel must have been a Swinhoe's – was based more on assumption than assessment of the facts, and they promised that their analysis would be 'based on research rather than guesswork'. Nonetheless, we were both surprised by the conclusions of the different commentators, and astonished at the rationale behind some of their analyses. It was only quite recently that we learned of one another's thoughts on these matters, and we felt that it might be interesting to present our joint perspective on the matter.

We should first outline our own experience with the species discussed in this article. We have no field experience of any of the dark-rumped *Oceanodroma* petrels, so our knowledge of these species is derived solely from the study of published reference material and specimens at the Natural History Museum, Tring. We do, however, have considerable field experience with Leach's *O. leucorhoa*, Wilson's *Oceanites oceanicus* and European Storm-petrels *Hydrobates pelagicus*, principally in Irish and British waters, while KM has seen small numbers of Madeiran Storm-petrels *Oceanodroma castro* and Bulwer's Petrels *Bulweria bulwerii* at sea, between Portugal and Madeira.

The purpose of this paper is to draw attention to what we believe is a fundamental flaw in the various analyses of the evidence, and to suggest a more plausible solution to this fascinating puzzle. We will analyse a combination of factors which appear to have led different commentators to conclude that the bird was one or other of the larger *Oceanodroma* species. We discuss and eliminate several of the species originally proposed as the solution to the problem, including Matsudaira's *O. matsudairae*, Tristram's *O. tristrami* and Markham's Storm-petrels *O. markhami*, and this suggests to us that there seems to be only one real candidate for the true identity of the *Chalice* petrel: Swinhoe's Storm-petrel.

The size of the Chalice *petrel*

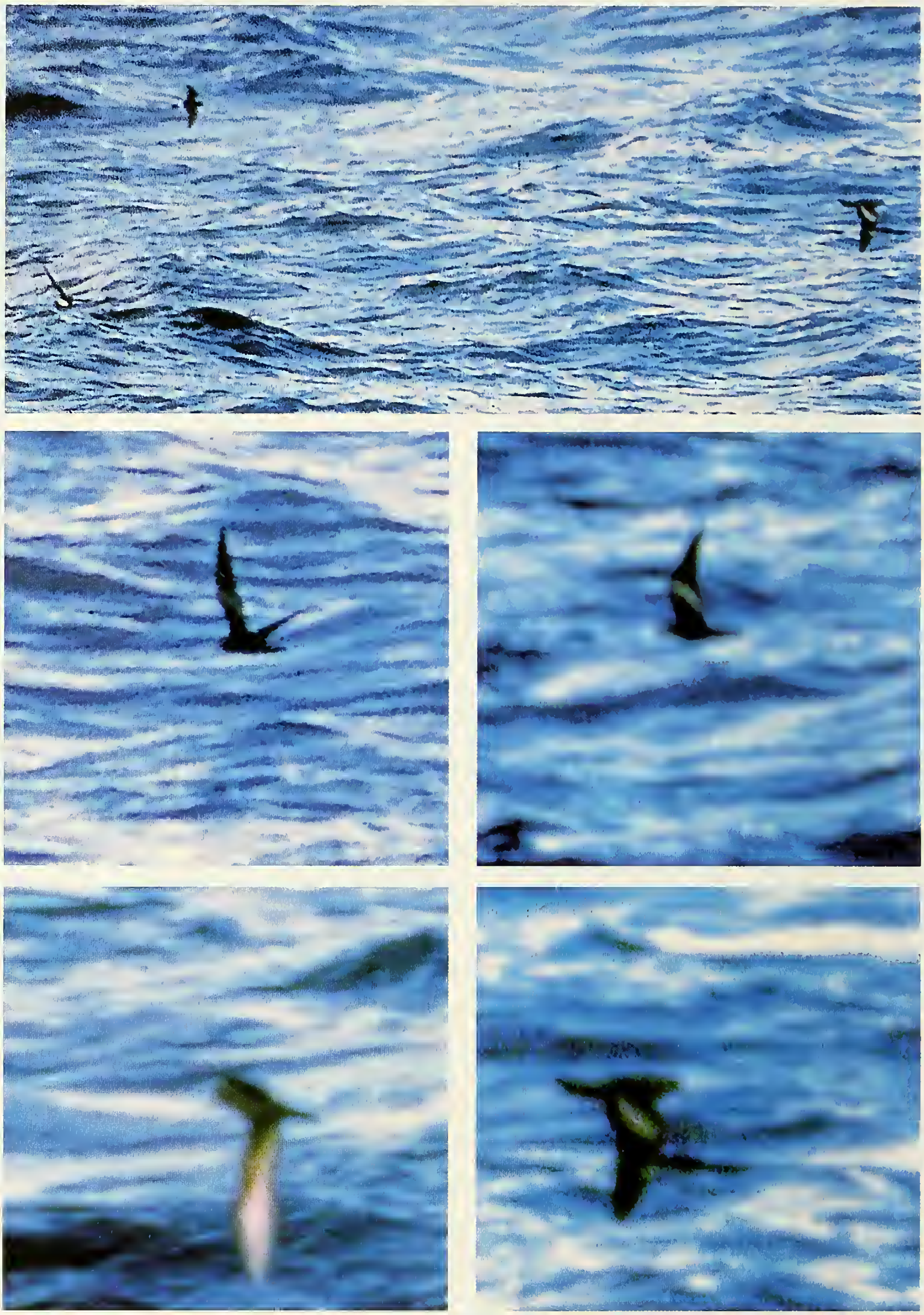
Undoubtedly, one of the most critical first steps in determining the identification of any out-of-range dark-rumped *Oceanodroma* is to establish what size it is. Judging the relative size of one seabird compared with others around it can be difficult at the best of times. There is, however, at least a consensus in the majority of field descriptions that the *Chalice* petrel appeared to be approximately twice the size of a European Storm-petrel:

- 'and size disparity with [European] Storm-petrel was, to say the least, astounding, appearing twice if not 2.5 times that species' length and wingspan'
- 'approximately twice the size of a European Storm-petrel' (the assessment of four observers)
- 'realistically up to 60% larger [than Wilson's or European Storm-petrel]'
- 'at least half as long again and approaching twice the wingspan [of European Storm-petrel]'

(Hume *et al.* 1997)

While one would not necessarily expect this to be the case by looking at comparative biometrics, this is actually very much the impression that a single Leach's Storm-petrel can convey when viewed directly alongside European Storm-petrels. We can both recall our own astonishment when we first saw the two species together at close range; Leach's can appear huge compared with the diminutive European Storm-petrel but there seems to have been little account taken of this propensity in the discussion of the *Chalice* petrel. It is not unusual for observers, upon seeing their first Leach's in close company with European Storm-petrels, to estimate their size as being similar to that of a Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*, or 'about twice the size of the Stormies'.

A significant disparity is apparent between Peter Harrison's judgement of the bird's size and the assessment made by most other observers on the boat. PH describes it initially in his field notes, when compared with European Storm-petrels, as twice if not 2½ times that species' length and wingspan. With some contradiction, later in the same set of field notes, he describes the bird as having a wingspan three to four times that of a European Storm-petrel, which would indicate a bird that



J. P. Hall

J. P. Hall

J. P. Hall

J. P. Hall

J. P. Hall

194-198. The *Chalice* petrel, at sea off Scilly, 3rd August 1988. These images were originally published in Young & King 1997. Plate 194 shows the *Chalice* petrel alongside two European Storm-petrels *Hydrobates pelagicus*, and forms the basis for Killian Mullarney's drawing in fig. 1. Note, in particular, the size of the *Chalice* petrel compared with the attendant European Storm-petrels in plate 194 (discussed fully within the text). Other critical features to note from these photos are the pattern of the upperwing, and the presence (and position) of a small patch on the upperwing (visible in plates 194-196 and 198), which corresponds with the white shafts on the upperwing of Swinhoe's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma monorhis*.

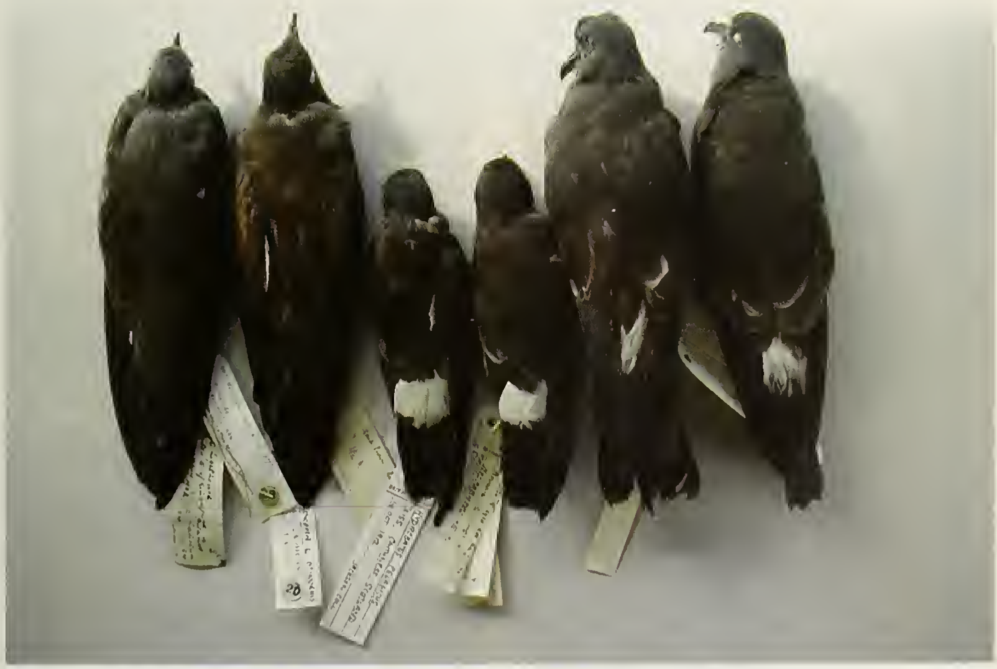
appeared to have a wingspan approaching that of an average-sized Herring Gull *Larus argentatus.*

In fact, Harrison's account is disarmingly honest as he describes how he eventually came to the conclusion that the bird must be a Matsudaira's Petrel. He began with the view that it was a '100% certain Bulwer's Petrel', changing to Tristram's Petrel (and also considering Swinhoe's Storm-petrel) only when the bird came close enough for him to see that it had a forked tail. He then changed his mind again, to Matsudaira's, when the photographs became available almost a month after the observation.

Throughout the identification process, the possibility of the *Chalice* petrel being a Swinhoe's Storm-petrel was dismissed on account of the perceived large size. What has become increasingly evident is that Swinhoe's Storm-petrel, with its more outstretched wings and markedly different flight style from Leach's Storm-petrel, is liable to be perceived *in the field* as a larger bird than Leach's Storm-petrel, and is even potentially confusable with Bulwer's Petrel (see section on 'Field appearance of a Swinhoe's Storm-petrel observed in the North Atlantic'). It is our opinion that an incorrect interpretation of the *Chalice* petrel's apparent large size has been the main factor that has misdirected the identification from the outset. We believe that correct evaluation of the photographic evidence and the field descriptions establishes that the *Chalice* petrel was, in fact, approximately the size of a Leach's Storm-petrel (and, therefore, in the context of a dark-rumped *Oceanodroma* petrel in the North Atlantic, almost certainly a Swinhoe's Storm-petrel).

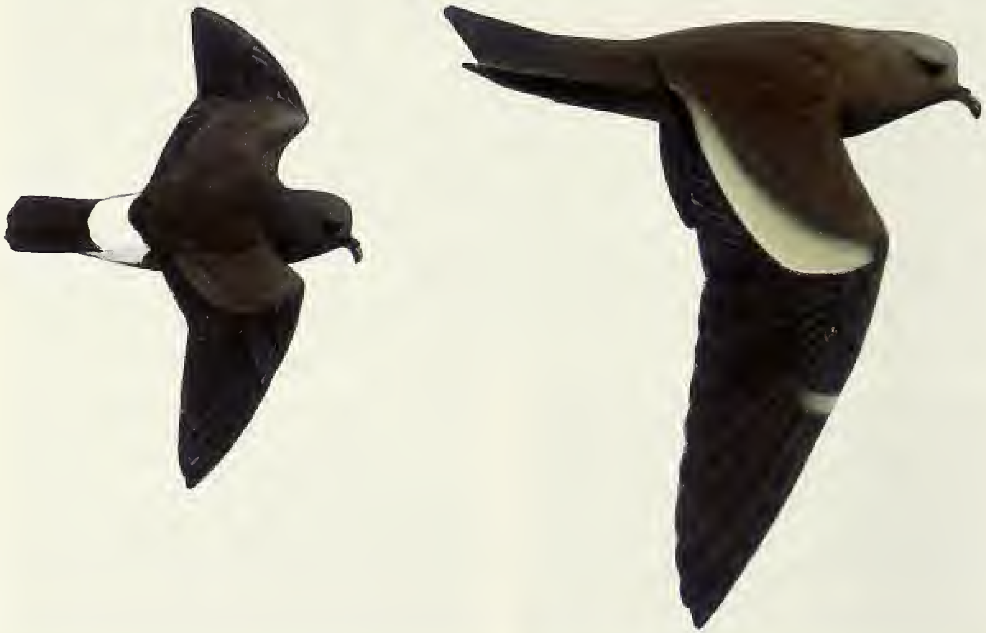
Size of the Chalice *petrel in the photographs*

Only one of the published photographs of the *Chalice* petrel shows it with European Storm-petrels (*Brit. Birds* 90: plate 82, reproduced here as plate 194). We agree with Young & King (1997) that 'some difficulty is attached to comparing the sizes of birds within a photograph', this being especially true in this photograph, in which the three birds (two European Storm-petrels and the *Chalice* petrel) are tiny, blurred and their respective distances from the camera can only be guessed. We do not, however, share



Russell Slack, © The Natural History Museum, Tring

199. Comparison of specimens of three key species in the *Chalice* petrel debate: Swinhoe's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma monorhis* (two birds on left), European Storm-petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus* (two birds in centre) and Leach's Storm-petrel *O. leucorhoa* (two birds on right). The specimens of European and Leach's were obtained in the UK, the Swinhoe's from Singapore. The size difference between the considerably larger Swinhoe's and Leach's and the smaller European Storm-petrels is similar to the size comparison which observers of the *Chalice* petrel made when comparing it with the accompanying European Storm-petrels.



Killian Mullarney

Fig. 1. Enhanced illustration of the *Chalice* petrel (right) and a European Storm-petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*, based on J. P. Hall's photograph (reproduced here as plate 194). Comparative sizes of the two figures are exactly the same as in the photograph; careful measurement of the overall length of the two birds indicates a ratio of 1: 1.5, approximately the same as between European Storm-petrel and Swinhoe's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma monorhis*.

Young & King's confidence in the measurements they have taken in order to establish the size of the *Chalice* petrel relative to the European Storm-petrels in the same photograph. In particular, we are sceptical that the wing-chord measurement (i.e. wing-tip to bend of wing) of the *Chalice* petrel (which assumes that the plane of the bird's outer wing is perfectly perpendicular to the line-of-sight) can be usefully compared with the estimated wingspan of the European Storm-petrel in the foreground. While being admittedly somewhat subjective, by just studying the photograph for a couple of minutes and concentrating on comparing the two birds which are in profile, we can gain an impression of their relative sizes. At this point, we would say that the size of the *Chalice* petrel relative to the two European Storm-petrels (and particularly the bird in profile) is actually about the same as that which is conveyed by a Leach's Storm-petrel among European Storm-petrels in the field.

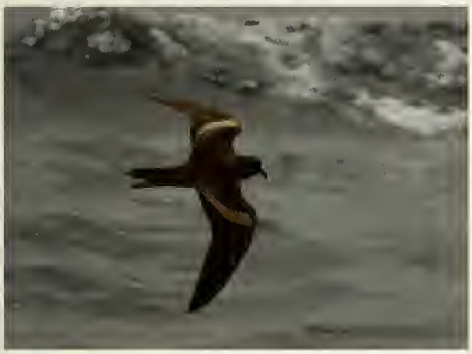
The only measurement that we do have some confidence in is a rough comparison of the overall length (in profile) of the *Chalice* petrel with that of the further of the two European Storm-petrels in the same photograph. The European Storm-petrel is about two-thirds the length of the *Chalice* petrel, a ratio of European: *Chalice* of 1:1.5. If we compare the length of an average European Storm-petrel (14 cm) with that of an average Leach's Storm-petrel (21 cm), we arrive at exactly the same result: European Storm-petrels are about two-thirds the size of Leach's Storm-petrels, a ratio of 1:1.5. This crucial piece of evidence can be more clearly illustrated with drawings based on this photograph, reproduced here at a larger size, enhanced with a little artistic licence and slightly 'sharpened' (fig. 1). As already pointed out by Young & King, a calculation based on measurement of the further European Storm-petrel will, if anything, overestimate the size of the dark-rumped bird (because the latter is clearly the closer of the two) but even so, the measurements do *not* support the conclusion that the *Chalice* petrel was as large a bird as it may have seemed. It is also worth noting at this point that the Swinhoe's Storm-petrels trapped at Tynemouth averaged about 5% larger than both nominate Leach's and North Pacific Swinhoe's in terms of wing-chord measurement (Cubitt *et al.* 1992).

Plumage features

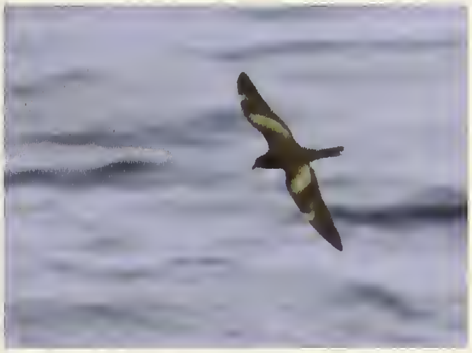
Pale primary-shafts

Although specifically looked for at the time, none of the observers noticed any hint of the pale primary-shafts which are normally considered an easily observed and important feature in separating Matsudaira's from other dark-rumped *Oceanodroma* petrels (Harrison 1987; see also plate 201). It was not until John Hall's photographs were developed that it became apparent that there was evidence of poorly marked pale primary-shafts. The simple conclusion should perhaps have been that this dark-rumped petrel did not show the normally conspicuous white primary shafts of Matsudaira's, but *did* show less obvious pale primary shafts, visible only in the photographic record. The presence of white at the base of the primary shafts was known to be a feature of Swinhoe's Storm-petrel at the time, but it was considered to be an in-the-hand feature, not normally visible at sea (Bailey *et al.* 1968; Harrison 1983). Nonetheless, as it was thought that Swinhoe's had already been eliminated on size, it was concluded that the bird must have been a Matsudaira's Storm-petrel, despite Harrison's clear discomfort that *had* the bird really been a Matsudaira's, white primary shafts should have been clearly visible in the field. It has also become apparent that Markham's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma markhami* can show white on the primary shafts as distinct as that on Swinhoe's Storm-petrel (Harrison 1987, page 251, also noted by Young & King 1997; see also plate 200).

Members of the Seabird Advisory Panel (SAP, a temporary sub-committee of BBRC, charged with assessing records of rare seabirds) who examined the transparencies felt that, since these pale patches were not detected by any of the 12 observers in the field, this feature in the photographs is 'most probably due to a reflection of light from a wave immediately behind the bird: the white highlight appeared to create


Hadoram Shirihai

200. Markham's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma markhami*, Eastern Pacific, October 2003.


Mike Dazenbaker

201. Matsudaira's Petrel *Oceanodroma matsudairae*, Ogasawara Islands, Japan, June 1999.

Mike Dazenbaker

202. Tristram's Petrel *Oceanodroma tristrami*, off Izu Islands, Japan, June 1999.

Mike Dazenbaker

203. Bulwer's Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii*, Ogasawara Islands, Japan, June 1999.

a "notch" in the wing, purely an optical or photographic effect' (Hume *et al.* 1997). One member of the SAP, however, felt that the apparent pale colour of the primary shafts was a genuine feature. We were kindly loaned the BBRC files on the *Chalice* petrel and the same copy-slides that were available to the SAP, the best of which were reproduced in Young & King 1997, and here as plates 194-198. There is absolutely no doubt, in our opinion, that what appears to be a small pale patch at the base of the primaries, *in every image* that shows the upperwing, is real, and is not a photographic or optical illusion. Given that the pale primary shafts appear to be much less pronounced in Swinhoe's than in Matsudaira's it is quite likely that they are difficult to detect in flight, even at close range, but may nevertheless be captured on film. We both make considerable use of bird photographs and it is not at all unusual to discern indistinct features in a photograph which are very difficult to detect in the field, especially on birds which are continually moving.

Upperwing bar

Before he had seen the photographs showing pale at the base of the primaries, Peter Harrison considered that the upperwing bar, which seemed to him to extend all the way to the leading edge of the wing without any 'narrowing', favoured Tristram's, and was wrong for Swinhoe's. In fact, the upperwing bar appears to be a variable feature on Swinhoe's Storm-petrel, to a degree similar to that found on Leach's Storm-petrel, i.e. some have a pale carpal bar which reaches to the leading edge of the wing, while that of others falls short (for example, compare the photographs published in *Birding World* 7: 272 and 11: 257). Determining the precise extent of the upperwing bar on a flying seabird is often difficult without recourse to photographic evidence. In this case, the photographs show a wing-bar on the *Chalice* petrel which fits comfortably within the normal variation of the pale carpal bar on Swinhoe's Storm-petrel.

Tail fork

The *Chalice* petrel was noted by Peter Harrison as having 'a much shallower [fork in the tail] than, say, a Leach's'; but this was qualified with 'although tail often spread when changing position so this could have been an illusion'. In his retrospective discussion of the identification, Harrison went on to say that the bird 'looked "exactly" like a Markham's Storm-petrel' except 'tail not nearly so deeply notched'. Another observer, S. A. Young, stated that 'the tail fork did not appear especially deep, being about ⅓ of overall tail length, *but* at no time was the tail observed fully "open"'. Other observers simply mentioned that the tail was forked, but no-one noted a particularly deep fork.

As indicated earlier, we do not have any first-hand experience of dark-rumped *Oceanodroma* petrels, but published photographs indicate that both Matsudaira's and Markham's have a much deeper tail-fork than Swinhoe's Storm-petrel. Indeed, the few available photos of Swinhoe's suggest that it often holds the tail rather tightly folded, showing no obvious fork, which appears to be the case in several of the published photos of the *Chalice* petrel. The only photo in which the tail is a little more spread suggests a very shallow fork.

Head colour

A subtle feature, but possibly one of some relevance, was noted by H. Wallis, in his field notes, when he described and illustrated a 'greyish hue to the head and shoulders' of the *Chalice* petrel. This is typical of Swinhoe's Storm-petrel (Snow & Perrins 1998), and was certainly shown by the Tynemouth Swinhoe's (J. McLoughlin pers. comm.; *Brit. Birds* 88: plates 94-96, plate 206). Matsudaira's Storm-petrel is described as having 'head and body, dark brown' (Marchant & Higgins 1990).

Flight style

Addressing the issue of flight style is something of a minefield because of the variable and subjective ways in which flight is often described. In general terms, the *Chalice* petrel was described as flying with long glides and few wingbeats, and comparison was made both with swifts *Apus* and nightjars (Caprimulgidae). It was clearly different in appearance from Leach's Storm-petrel. The described flight style seems consistent with the descriptions of putative Swinhoe's seen in the eastern North Atlantic (see below), and is not inconsistent with accounts such as Bailey (1968).

Field appearance of a Swinhoe's Storm-petrel observed in the North Atlantic

The account by O'Brien *et al.* (1999) of a presumed Swinhoe's Storm-petrel seen from a boat in the northwest Atlantic is a most illuminating contribution to any debate reviewing the identity of the *Chalice* petrel, and is an excellent example of a most thorough description and record analysis, setting the standard for modern boat-based seabird records. The bird was seen and photographed off Hatteras, North Carolina, on 8th August 1998 (plates 204 & 205), and follows a report of a probable Swinhoe's seen off Manteo, North Carolina, on 20th August 1993 (Brinkley 1995). It is important to note that European Storm-petrels (the smallest storm-petrel in the North Atlantic) are not part of the context in which Swinhoe's has been seen off eastern North America.

The documentation by Michael O'Brien, Brian Patteson, George Armistead and Grayson Pearce of the Swinhoe's Storm-petrel off Hatteras is difficult to summarise well without doing their work an injustice, owing to the considerable detail in which they discussed the observation, and it is recommended reading for any student of dark-rumped petrel identification in the North Atlantic. The authors were able to compare the bird directly with Leach's, Band-rumped (Madeiran) and Wilson's Storm-petrels over a period of 40-45 minutes and occasionally down to ranges of about 25 m. The following points are relevant to the identification of the *Chalice* petrel:

1) While they were able to ascertain the bird's size as about the same length as Leach's and Madeiran Storm-petrels, the impression was of a bird slightly larger than both of these species.

2) It appeared proportionately longer-winged (due, in part, to the wings being held straighter, and more outstretched, i.e. with a less pronounced bend at the carpal joint), with narrower-looking 'arm' and longer and broader 'hand', when compared with Leach's: 'the wings always looked longer than those of nearby Leach's'.

3) The 'slim tail gave the bird a long-tailed look in direct flight'. Only when 'the rectrices and primaries were spread and the full wing area revealed, [was it that] the bird actually looked quite short-tailed'.

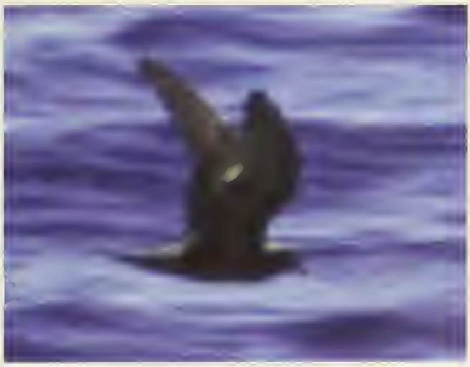
4) The white at the base of the primaries was 'very inconspicuous and only visible when the bird was at its very closest'. 'Photographs confirm... that there is a very restricted white patch at the base of the outer primaries, visible in both the spread and folded wing positions.'

5) The tail was more shallowly notched than that of Leach's and not considered to be deep enough for any of the larger dark-rumped storm-petrels such as Matsudaira's, Markham's or Tristram's.

6) Flight style was described as 'slow, "loping" [with] relatively shallow wingstrokes; the longer glides and generally more direct flight collectively produced a flight pattern inconsistent with any Leach's we have encountered...'

It should be noted that this record is not without controversy, having been accepted by the North Carolina Records Committee, but rejected by the ABA. In their rejection, the ABA voiced concern that a dark-rumped Leach's Petrel could not be eliminated. Strangely, however, in a response to a published query of their decision (Wilson *et al.* 2004) the ABA

George Armistead



George Armistead

204 & 205. Swinhoe's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma monorhis*, off Hatteras, North Carolina, USA, August 1998. See text for discussion of this record.

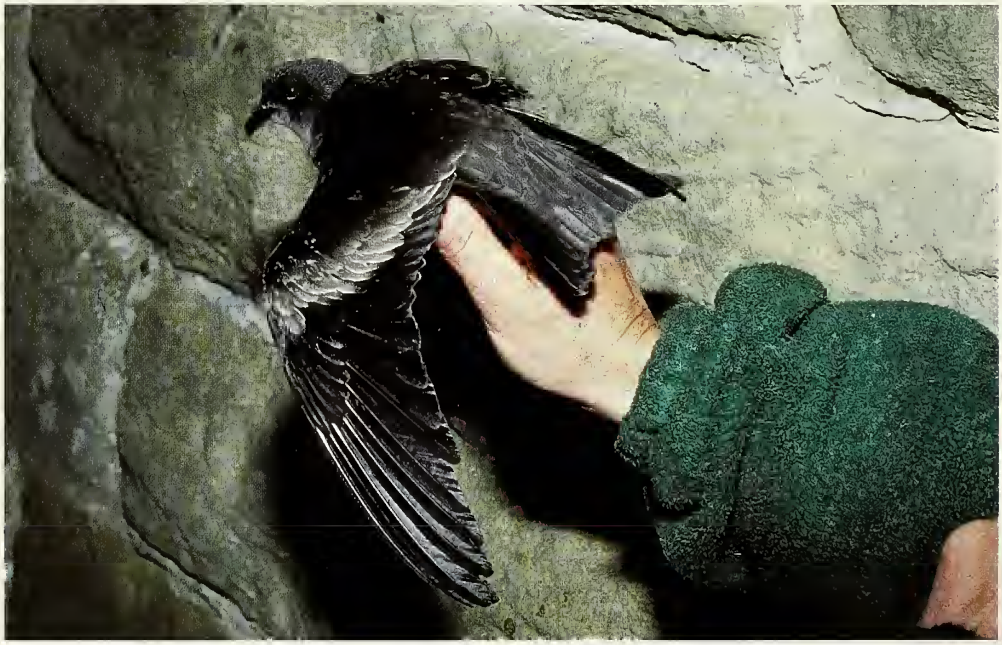
commented: 'The documentation we evaluated was limited to poor-quality photographs of a single bird.' This suggests that no use was made of the extensive field notes, which clearly indicate that the bird's flight action and size were inconsistent with Leach's Storm-petrel, including dark-rumped birds (presumably of the race *chapmani* of the eastern Pacific, which averages significantly smaller than nominate Leach's, and would be considerably rarer than Swinhoe's, having never been recorded in the North Atlantic).

In an earlier account of a probable Swinhoe's Storm-petrel seen for five minutes on 20th August 1993, Ned Brinkley describes a bird very similar to the 1998 Hatteras Swinhoe's. His first impressions of the bird recalled Bulwer's Petrel. The bird appeared to be long-winged (more so than Leach's Storm-petrel) with a greater caudal projection (extent of body and tail beyond the rear edge of the wings), with the wings held out and away from the body, thus lacking the sharper angle at the carpal joint of Leach's. At 10 m he could see five or six short white primary shafts, but these were not visible at distances beyond about 15 m.

The assumption seems to have been that Swinhoe's Storm-petrel should approximate closely to the appearance of Leach's Storm-petrel, but with an all-dark rump. Recent field experience in the North Atlantic, however, has demonstrated that it may appear to be a remarkably different-looking seabird, even though it has similar biometrics to Leach's.

Conclusion

We are well aware that had we been on the deck of the M. V. *Chalice* in August 1988, we would, in all probability, have experienced the same difficulty identifying this bird as those who were there. In our view, however, the subsequent assessment by the SAP did not do justice to the record. The realisation that Swinhoe's Storm-petrels were present in the North Atlantic should have prompted a critical re-evaluation of the basis upon which this species was so quickly and conclusively eliminated from the list of possibilities. Within the BBRC file on the *Chalice* petrel, there are clearly missed opportunities. Colin Bradshaw, who had seen and photographed one of the Tynemouth Swinhoe's alongside a European Storm-petrel commented: 'I am surprised at the perception of Swinhoe's being "small". I suppose that's in comparison to Matsudaira's, etc. It looks *enormous* compared to British Stormie!' The (then) BBRC Chairman, Peter Lansdown, commented: 'Peter Harrison is trying to get pictures showing



Colin Bradshaw

206. Swinhoe's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma monorhis*, Tynemouth, Tyne & Wear, July 1992. Note the upperwing pattern of the Swinhoe's, in particular the distinct pale shafts at the base of the outer primaries, and compare this pattern with that shown by the *Chalice* petrel in plates 194-196 and 198.

Storm and Leach's Petrel together.' It is clear from the note that this line was being pursued to eliminate a Leach's-sized bird (i.e. Swinhoe's) from the assessment. Unfortunately, it appears that no such pictures were obtained.

During previous reviews of this record, no account appears to have been taken of how large a Swinhoe's could appear among European Storm-petrels, and vital evidence provided by the photographs seems to have been misinterpreted or overlooked. With problematic identifications of this sort, we are often guided by those with most expertise, and the emphasis that Peter Harrison (arguably the most authoritative seabird expert of the day) placed on this being 'an ENORMOUS storm-petrel' was, it seems, never properly challenged or re-evaluated. Anyone relying on the published discussion of the identification might well have believed that, as the *Chalice* petrel was clearly not a Swinhoe's, it must have been an even rarer species or, as Rob Hume suggested, 'the greatest "one that got away" of all time' (presumably meaning either a Matsudaira's or a Markham's Storm-petrel, neither of which has ever been observed in the Western Palearctic).

The more recent occurrence of a well-documented Swinhoe's, seen from a boat in the western North Atlantic at the same time of year as the *Chalice* petrel, gives a fresh perspective to the identification of dark-rumped petrels in the North Atlantic. It seems likely that some records of vagrant dark-rumped petrels in northwest Europe, which have been accepted as Bulwer's Petrels or mooted as large *Oceanodroma* petrels such as Matsudaira's, will no longer stand up to scrutiny as a clearer appreciation of the field appearance of Swinhoe's Storm-petrel emerges.

Acknowledgments

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Letters

The distribution of Macqueen's Bustard

The distribution map showing the range of Macqueen's Bustard *Chlamydotis macqueenii* in the paper by Sangster *et al.* (2004) is misleading as far as Oman is concerned. It has long been known that this species is a breeding resident in Oman (Gallacher & Woodcock 1980), and is, in fact, quite widespread in the south of the country. Proved breeding has been recorded in six half-degree squares, all but one in the extreme northwest of the country, between 19°N and 21°N (Oman Bird Records Committee 1998). Possible or probable breeding is suspected in a further 13 half-degree squares, again mostly south of 21°N.

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Are there really two species of houbara?

The closest relative of the Houbara Bustard *Chlamydotis undulata* is the Great Bustard *Otis tarda* (Pitra *et al.* 2002; Broders *et al.* 2003), and these two species were treated as congeneric by Dementiev & Gladkov (1968). Both species are polytypic, with two subspecies of Great Bustard (*tarda* and *dybowskii*), and three of Houbara (*undulata*, *fuertaventurae* and *macqueenii*) (*BWP*). Sangster *et al.* (2004) recommended that *macqueenii* be treated as a separate species, however: Macqueen's Bustard *C. macqueenii.* Idaghdour *et al.* (2004) estimated that *undulata* and *macqueenii* separated approximately 430,000 years ago and that *fuertaventurae* and *undulata* separated about 20,000-25,000 years ago. Pitra *et al.* (2000) estimated that the Iberian population of *tarda* separated from *tarda* further east in Europe about 200,000 years ago.

The breeding ranges of *undulata* and *macqueenii* are considered to occur to the west and east of the Nile river in Egypt respectively, e.g. Sangster *et al.* (2004). The *macqueenii* that breed, or bred, in Arabia require further attention, however: 'Populations of Arabia intermediate: upperparts in some bright cinnamon [as nominate], with marks nearly as heavy as nominate, and chest variably washed with white, but as a whole nearer *macqueenii*' (*BWP*). The map in Sangster *et al.* (2004) does not show the resident populations of *macqueenii* in Oman and Yemen (e.g. Goriup 1997) or the previously far more widespread distribution of breeding *macqueenii* in Saudi Arabia (e.g. Seddon 1997). Gaucher *et al.* (1996) and Broders *et al.* (2003) found that *macqueenii* from the Sinai formed a separate clade within their *macqueenii* clusters.

In their discussion, Sangster *et al.* (2004) make the point that although the molecular differences described between *undulata* and *macqueenii* are relatively small, they fall within the range of values of taxa considered to be valid species. They do, however, also fall within the range of values of recognised subspecies (e.g. Avise & Walker 1998). Such genetic studies provide little evidence concerning the intrinsic reproductive isolation of allopatric taxa (e.g. Sangster 1996) and the argument that *macqueenii* is a distinct species relies heavily on Gaucher *et al.*'s (1996) research describing mate attraction and courtship display in male *macqueenii* and *undulata.*

In the Great Bustard, the male's advertisement display sequence is a visual transformation from a relatively inconspicuous and generally brownish bird to an almost entirely white one, likened to the unfolding of petals of a gigantic flower. A male is probably able to attract a female's attention over a distance of several kilometres (Johnsgard 1991). The courtship display of the male Houbara Bustard is also a spectacularly visual affair, the running male looking like a moving white ball (Mendelssohn *et al.* 1979; Launay & Paillat 1990); 'The bird, which was previously well camouflaged, suddenly becomes visible as a white spot over distances of at least two kilometres in open land...' (Schulz & Seddon 1996).

Gaucher *et al.* (1996) reported that Houbara males produce low-pitched calls, which are uttered at the end of the display-run in the absence of a potential mate in the vicinity of the display area, and prior to restarting the run or ending display. The calls are, however, relatively quiet, being heard only up to 50 m away; by contrast, the booming moan of the displaying male Great Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigriceps* can be heard as far as 1 km away under ideal conditions (Johnsgard 1991). Sangster *et al.* (2004) stated that the calls described by Gaucher *et al.* (1996) were apparently first reported for Houbara Bustard display by Alekseev (1985). Alekseev (1985) actually stated that 'During courtship display not all birds are silent as is stated in the literature. In April 1959, I observed one which rose up from the ground with a peculiar high trill and, with its feathers quivering, flew for about 300 m.' Clearly, this describes a very different sound and display. Interestingly, Launay & Paillat (1990) noted bill-clapping, not vocalisation, at the end of display-runs, in a previous study of *macqueenii.* Mendelssohn *et al.* (1979) made no mention of vocalisations in their description of display-running by a captive male *macqueenii* observed at close range.

Collar (1996) suggested that the copulation ceremony might be a key mechanism in the prevention of breeding between different bustard species. The precopulation display of male *undulata* and *macqueenii* appears identical apart from differences in plumage coloration and crest posture (Gaucher *et al.* 1996).

I contend that the differences in male courtship display between *undulata* and *macqueenii*, involving plumage, calls and behaviour, may well be functionally relatively trivial and would not prevent future interbreeding. Gaucher *et al.*'s (1996) behavioural research raises many more questions than it answers. For the time being at least, I suggest that we follow conventional wisdom concerning species limits in the Houbara Bustard, in other words that *macqueenii* remains a subspecies of *C. undulata.*

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Are there really two species of houbara? – a response from the TSC

The BOURC's Taxonomic Sub-committee (TSC) is grateful for Dr Cowan's interesting comments on the subject of the specific status of Houbara and Macqueen's Bustards. He and others have pointed out the errors in the distribution map presented in our paper, which was, however, not drawn by us.

We regret that the data on crude genetic distance between *undulata* and *macqueenii* were presented in such a way that Dr Cowan believed we were in some way trying to ignore the fact that divergence of 0.7-1.1% is also compatible with intraspecific variation. This is not the issue. The key point is that *undulata* and *macqueenii* form reciprocally monophyletic groups in all molecular studies, which indicates that they have unique, divergent evolutionary histories. There is nothing to suggest that the genetic divergence of the two taxa should fall outside the range of more divergent subspecies of other species. Indeed, such arguments are dangerously circular. The fact that there is any clear genetic divergence at all between the two taxa, in spite of their previously more extensive distributions (which would possibly have facilitated hybridisation), argues strongly for their separate specific status.

Some plumage characters (notably the upperparts and chest) in the Arabian population of *macqueenii* are intermediate between *undulata* and Asian *macqueeni*, but we never claimed these to be diagnostic. We described morphological, behavioural and vocal characters which *are* diagnostic. These obvious differences are, to varying extents, relevant to the courtship *and* precopulation displays of both taxa. Currently, it can be neither proved nor refuted that they are sufficient to prevent interbreeding, although all the evidence is consistent with the view that the visual and acoustic display is intended to reach a potential partner. In any case, the Guidelines that we follow (Helbig *et al.* 2002) do not demand that reproductive isolation is demonstrated between allopatric taxa. Indeed, the nature of allopatry means that this is usually impossible. Our criteria require that the taxa are diagnosable, and that the level of divergence between them is comparable with that shown between other closely related sympatric taxa. We believe that we have done this.

Finally, it is not clear exactly who the 'we' are that Dr Cowan refers to in his final sentence. The TSC recommendations apply only to the British List maintained by the BOU, and *British Birds* has decided to follow BOU decisions on taxonomy. The differences between *macqueenii* and *undulata* are slight, and any decision will be marginal. Nonetheless, the recommendation to split these taxa has also been adopted by the Dutch, German and Swedish taxonomic committees.

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English names for Western Palearctic birds

The renewed discussion of English bird names (*Brit. Birds* 97: 2-5, 144-145) omits to deal with what is surely the most debatable case, the arbitrary introduction (without any discussion) of the North American name 'Mew Gull' for what used to be called the Common Gull *Larus canus* in the sixth edition of the BOU *Checklist of the Birds of Great Britain and Ireland* in 1992 (now increasingly used, although not adopted by *British Birds*), and discussed at the 2003 BOU AGM (*Ibis* 146: 190-191). If we take E. B. Lockwood's *Oxford Book of Bird Names* (OUP, Oxford, 1984), under 'Mew' he says: 'Although today a rare literary word, it is in fact the native English term for a Sea Gull, going back via Middle English *mew* to Old English *mew*, *mæw*. It remained in ordinary use until the seventeenth century when it was ousted by the newcomer gull. The name is Common Germanic, as seen by the Dutch *meeuw*, German *Möwe*, further Old Norse *mar*... most likely of imitative origin. It survived in local use down to the last century.' And under Gull: 'Makes its debut in 1430. In origin, a Celtic word from the Cornish coast... During the seventeenth century this exotic name largely replaced the native names Cob and especially Mew. It represents the late Cornish *gullen*... from... Welsh *uilan*... literally wailer, an appropriate name for most species, particularly the Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*.'

In French these names are also represented by 'mouette' for smaller gulls and 'goéland' for larger ones. In other words, Mew Gull is a tautonym, repeating the same name twice, and if the name Common Gull is considered unsatisfactory (possibly when the name first came into use it was the commonest gull?), it would be better to refer to the Common Mew.

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The Editorial Comment which discussed the naming of Common or Mealy Redpoll *Carduelis flammea* correctly noted that the Common Gull *Larus canus* is 'clearly not the most abundant gull in the UK' (*Brit. Birds* 97: 145). This species is typically a gull of short pasture and grassland, especially during the winter, the season when it is most widely dispersed throughout the UK. Presumably this has been its preferred feeding habitat since the days when this habitat would have been supplied largely by the grazed common lands, where it was doubtless abundant and well known. It would have been the typical gull of the commons, the common gull.

Although common lands have unfortunately largely disappeared, *L. canus* is still to be found feeding on grazed or mown grassland which is often in common use, e.g. parks, airfields, golf courses and playing fields. It is still the typical gull of the common grasslands and perhaps its vernacular name is derived not from any measurement of abundance but from the description of its preferred feeding habitat. I, like many others I am sure, would prefer to retain the name Common Gull rather than Mew Gull, Barking Maa or any other proposed alternative.

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The dangers in photographs, arranged artwork and their captions

As I have had little luck with 'softies' and like *Pterodroma*, I launched eagerly into Andrew Harrop's recent review of the 'soft-plumaged petrel' *P. madeira/feae/mollis* complex (*Brit. Birds* 97: 6-15.). Alas, the paper returned me, and doubtless many other seabird enthusiasts, almost to square one. It squelched not just what I had tentatively distilled into the *BWP* Concise texts (written in 1995), but also what had been so exciting in the chain of recent advances in *Pterodroma* lore published in *Birding World* over the last decade.

One of the problems with the illustrated texts of seabirds is the variable captioning and reproduction of the *crucial* 'photographs of known identity'. Harrop draws attention to this nuisance by exemplifying the use of photographs captioned as Zino's Petrel *P. madeira* which had been published earlier as featuring Fea's Petrel *P. feae*. Such confusions are not limited to seabirds but are made much worse in their cases when the figures are left without the full provenance of marine area, date, light factor, range and lens magnification.

Happily, Harrop has not added much to the mess but, given his whistle-blowing at others' risky conclusions, should he have included his plate 4 of a 'presumed Feas's'? The caption could well lead readers to attribute a 'quite rounded' wingtip to that species. The featured bird does appear to have a stubby bill, suggesting *feae*, but in my magnifying glass it looks small and slim-bodied, which (with its wing-tip shape) indicates *madeira*. Surely, in the context of Harrop's general conservatism, this should have been captioned '*feae/madeira*', as plate 6. Furthermore, since by accident of angle and lighting, plate 6 suggests Soft-plumaged Petrel *P. mollis* more than either *feae* or *madeira*, should it have been included at all? Despite the demurral in the caption, it is strikingly small-billed.

Worse still, whatever possessed Ian Lewington to add seven images of the 'compounded' *feae/madeira* in 'windy and calm conditions' to his fig. 3? I can think of no previous illustration which has led observers into what I can only describe as a 'lumped' perception of two clearly different, if so far cryptic, species. This adds nothing to the debate.

If *BB* is to continue to set high standards, please institute a tighter discipline for all images and their captions. And try to keep the authors and illustrators of reviews from having blind spots.

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The dangers in photographs... – a response from the authors

It is disingenuous of Ian Wallace to lecture others about method and discipline, especially as, by his own admission, he compiled texts and a figure relating to this group for *BWP* Concise despite having little first-hand experience of the species involved.

All the photographs used in the paper (carefully selected from a much larger series) were accompanied by captions which stated where and when they were taken. The other information which Wallace asks for (light factor, range and lens magnification) might also be helpful, though in practice it is very difficult for photographers always to record the first two of these if they are taking numerous photographs in rapid succession of birds at varying ranges and in changing light. The text and figures did, however, draw attention to the problems caused by variable light.

Turning to Wallace's more specific queries, his interpretation of plates 4 and 6 is strained. As the text explains, the most reliable way of distinguishing between individual *feae* and *madeira* (in the field, or in photographs) is to study the size and structure of their bills. Given what can be seen of its bill, there is no reasonable doubt that the bird in plate 4 is *feae* (the word 'presumed' in the caption was added only because the structure of the bill is not clearly visible in this case); since most of the bird's body is not visible, it is not clear how Wallace has concluded that it looks 'slim-bodied', and since there is nothing in the photograph with which to compare it, its size simply cannot be assessed. As the text also explains, *feae* can sometimes show a wing-tip which appears quite rounded (another example worth mentioning in this context is plate 5 in Gantlett (1995), which shows a bird with a very similar wing-tip shape). The bird in plate 6 does not 'suggest... *mollis* more than either *feae* or *madeira*'; this is actually quite typical of the appearance of *feae/madeira* in strong light (cf. fig. 3, and note the contrastingly slightly paler tail unlike the bird in plate 8).

Wallace has highlighted precisely the point which Ian Lewington aimed to illustrate with the seven birds at the bottom of fig. 3. As with all birds, wing shape changes according to wind conditions. Wallace (in *BWP* Concise) and Tove (2001) placed great emphasis on alleged differences in wing shape between these two species based on (and illustrated by) tracings from photographs of birds of contested identity taken in varying sea conditions. This is misleading. While there may be a difference apparent when the two species are seen together in the same conditions, this has yet to be proved. We know that *feae* can sometimes show a rounded wing-tip, so to place much importance on this feature as a means of identifying lone birds is unhelpful. Fig. 3 thus emphasized the degree of caution required when making judgements about lone birds based on wing shape: on current knowledge this character is of little use. Some identification problems cannot be simplified away in the way that Wallace pretends, and this is one of them.

On a more positive note, John Warham has written to draw attention to the sonograms of *feae*, *madeira* and *mollis* calls that he has published (Warham 1996, p. 281), though as he cautions it is very difficult to ensure that sonograms of calls of seabirds are homologous (truly comparable in terms of age, sex, etc.).

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Notes

Aggressive interactions between Spotted Crake and Pintail Snipe

On 24th October 2002, in the botanical garden on the campus of Sultan Qaboos University, near Al Khod, c. 45 km west of Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, we observed a Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana* and a Pintail Snipe *Gallinago stenura* feeding along a short stream that emptied into a 6.5-ha pond. The stream was fringed by vegetation ranging in height from 0.15 m to 0.45 m, and consisting primarily of Swamp Morning-glory *Ipomoea aquatica* and Water Hyssop *Bacopa monnieri,* with occasional grasses interspersed among the other herbs.

At 15.45 hrs, the Pintail Snipe was foraging in vegetation along the stream, probing between rocks, and the Spotted Crake was feeding along the shoreline of the pond, but gradually moved into the stream where it began feeding on snails. As the crake approached to within 1.0 m of the snipe, which was facing away from it, the crake made a soft vocalisation consisting of repeated clicks, thrust its head forward and moved toward the snipe. The snipe immediately crouched slightly, turned to face the crake obliquely, raised its tail, and held its head up and slightly back, thus making a U-shape with its body. Simultaneously, it fanned and twisted its tail sideways so that the fan faced the crake. The two birds remained stationary for approximately 1.5 seconds, with the snipe holding its tail fanned until the crake lowered and extended its head and walked swiftly toward the snipe, which then retreated rapidly. The snipe paused some 3.0 m from the crake: at this point, the two individuals could no longer see each other owing to the intervening vegetation, and both returned to foraging.

During the next 15 minutes, we observed three further interactions as the birds continued to forage in the stream. Each time that the crake approached to within 1.5-2.0 m of the snipe, the snipe would fan its tail, usually briefly but on one occasion for up to 10 seconds. The crake's response during these interactions was usually aggressive, although on one occasion it walked away from the snipe and returned to foraging after the snipe fanned its tail. The crake ended the other three encounters by walking rapidly towards the snipe with its head lowered. On two occasions, the snipe retreated and began to forage again only when it had moved behind vegetation which blocked its view of the crake. During the final encounter, the snipe leapt approximately 1.0 m into the air as the crake rushed towards it, and flew a short distance from the stream. The snipe then walked to the pond edge, where it entered dense vegetation and did not return during 50 minutes of observation, while the crake continued to forage in the stream.

Spotted Crake and Pintail Snipe are typically elusive species, with few reports describing the behaviour of either species, and no records of specific interactions (*BWP*). Although both are similarly sized, the Pintail Snipe appeared to be subordinate to the Spotted Crake in this contest over a particular foraging area. The longer bill of Pintail Snipe should allow it access to resources not available to Spotted Crake but the two species are likely to compete for food items found near the surface, including small snails in the stream at this particular site.

These observations suggest that Spotted Crake and Pintail Snipe may interact regularly where they occur together, even though we are not aware of previous reports. Although both species frequent wetland areas, Spotted Crakes occur almost exclusively in areas with shallow water and substantial vegetation cover, while Pintail Snipes frequent similar wetlands but may also be found in drier areas, including moist meadows and grassland. Their diet preferences also overlap, with both species feeding on, for example, aquatic insects and insect larvae, molluscs and vegetation. Any reduction of suitable habitat for these species, particularly in arid countries through which they pass on migration, may make it more difficult for Pintail Snipes to find undisturbed areas where they will not be displaced by Spotted Crakes.

Acknowledgments

We thank R. G. Bijlsma and A. Patzelt for their help in preparing this note.

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Great Black-backed Gull behaviour

On 2nd May 2003, while monitoring Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus* numbers at Skern, on the Taw estuary, Devon, I observed an adult gull detach itself from the main body of a group of Great Black-backs and move several metres away where it commenced to pull-up billfuls of Rock Samphire *Crithmum maritimum*, which it then washed vigorously with much head-shaking in channels carrying receding tide water. It then discarded the samphire, moved on a metre or two and repeated the pull, wash and discard ritual. It did this five times in all.

The following day, at the same location, I watched two adult Great Black-backed Gulls in close proximity to each other collecting billfuls of samphire and placing it on a common pile. They broke off the collecting activity, faced each other and nodded briefly several times. The male then mounted the female, not in the conventional manner but crosswise, with one foot on the lower neck and the other on the upper back, forcing the female into a head-down, tail-up posture, the male flapping all the while. This action continued for 7-8 seconds. The male then flew off and settled on the sea and the female squatted in front of the mound of plucked samphire and proceeded to toss pieces to either side and close to her body. Shortly after, the male returned to squat next to the female and both dozed. Later that day, I observed a third-year Great Black-back collecting green weed. It wandered aimlessly about the foreshore with it in its bill, periodically dropping it and picking it up again. It did this four times in all before finally discarding the weed and settling into a roosting posture.

In the case of the adult birds, I presumed that I was witnessing a variation of the grass-pulling activities sometimes engaged in by failed breeding Great Black-backed Gulls (see *BWP*) but in a form different from that described, and certainly in a manner I have not seen before.

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Sand Martins and House Martins nesting in a wall

On 27th June 2003, I visited an organic farm in Devon where Common Swifts *Apus apus*, Sand Martins *Riparia riparia*, Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica* and House Martins *Delichon urbicum* were all nesting in a single building, a two-storey barn built of red sandstone blocks with a cement rendering, slate roof and several openings (plate 207).

Up to five pairs of Common Swifts were nesting under the eaves, Barn Swallows were entering the building through open doors and windows and several occupied House Martin nests were visible under the eaves. On the south-facing wall, overlooking the farmyard, Sand Martins were entering a small gap between sandstone blocks where the rendering had fallen away. After watching for an hour or so, I established that one pair was feeding chicks in a cavity in the wall. Food was taken in and, on one occasion, a faecal pellet removed. The hole, rectangular in shape and approximately 8 cm x 3.5 cm, was 3.7 m above ground. There was no evidence of excavation by the

Andy Swash

207. The barn in Devon where Common Swifts *Apus apus*, Sand Martins *Riparia riparia*, Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica* and House Martins *Delichon urbicum* were all found nesting in a single building in June 2003.

Andy Swash

208. House Martin *Delichon urbicum* at entrance to nest-site in a farm barn, Devon, June 2003.

Andy Swash

209. Sand Martins *Riparia riparia* leaving nest-site in a farm barn, Devon, June 2003.

birds. The barn lies about 400 m from a small lake of about 0.5 ha, and the farmer told me that the birds had nested in the same site the previous year. Subsequently, I learnt that the young from this site fledged in early July.

During a follow-up visit a few days later, I confirmed that House Martins were nesting in a hole in the wall, similar to that used by the Sand Martins and some 2.5 m from the entrance to the Sand Martin site. The adult House Martins were carrying food, and chicks were heard calling immediately the adults entered the hole. The hole was irregular in shape, approximately 7 cm x 4 cm and about 3.6 m above ground, and located between sandstone blocks. There was no evidence of a mud construction anywhere in the vicinity of the hole.

On 16th July, I found no activity at the hole occupied by House Martins, although there were several juveniles in the vicinity; but when I visited on 16th August, to measure the external dimensions of the holes, I found that House Martins were once again feeding young in the same hole.

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EDITORIAL COMMENT Angela Turner has commented that: 'There are several records of both Sand Martins and House Martins nesting in holes in walls, and even of House Martins nesting in Sand Martin burrows (see Glutz von Blotzheim, U. N., & Bauer, K. M. (eds.), *Handbuch der Vögel Mitteleuropas*, 1985), but this is clearly a remarkable site.'

Wintering Lesser Whitethroat in West Sussex

A Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* was seen regularly in my garden in Worthing, West Sussex, from 17th November 2002 to 14th April 2003. The garden is small, but well-stocked with a variety of deciduous and evergreen shrubs and small trees, and lies about a kilometre from the sea. These notes outline the significance of this record, and describe the bird's behaviour during this time.

Blackcaps *S. atricapilla* sometimes visit the garden in winter, but seeing a Lesser Whitethroat in mid November was most unusual, as most leave Sussex in late August and September. In most years, the last one is recorded in October, with the mean departure date for the previous ten years being 18th October (*Sussex Bird Report* 54: 167). Four individuals have previously been reported in November, with the latest in Burgess Hill on 12th-21st November 1957 (James 1996). Records of wintering Lesser Whitethroats in Britain as a whole are few in number. Lack (1986) lists ten, but as the fieldwork was carried out from mid November to February this may include some late migrants which did not winter. Clark & Eyre (1993) list four winter records, although three were seen on just a single day (with the other at Southampton from 29th January to 19th April 1987).

The bird in November 2002 was initially an irregular visitor, typically seen searching shrubs and bushes for natural food. It showed an increasing awareness of Greenfinches *Carduelis chloris* using the sunflower and niger seed feeders – there is no soft fruit in the garden, and no scraps were provided in the area it frequented – and ten days after first appearing it made an unsuccessful attempt to land on the niger feeder. Its progress in learning to take seed from the feeders was, however, rudely interrupted by frequent visits to the garden by a Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*, and the Lesser Whitethroat subsequently disappeared for several days.

In early December it reappeared, and readily adapted to feeding on remnants on the ground under two peanut feeders which are mostly used by House Sparrows *Passer domesticus*. After a week, I first saw it try to cling onto one of the feeders, and over a subsequent two-week period its skill gradually improved until it pecked at the peanuts hard enough to obtain food. It was extremely timid and would only visit a feeder when no other birds were there, feeding on the ground when the feeders were occupied, and venturing no more than a metre from cover. Water provided in this area was readily taken, but niger seed put on the ground was not. In all situations it was at the bottom of the pecking order, and our resident Dunnock *Prunella modularis* had the rare opportunity to dominate.

The warbler managed to survive a cold snap in December, when the nearby pond was frozen over for several days; temperatures, however, fell no lower than -3°C and the wind-chill from strong easterly winds was perhaps a more serious test. The winter proved to be colder than those of recent years and another cold spell, at the end of January, brought a light covering of snow, which did not deter the warbler from trying to feed on the ground. Until the end of February, its visits to the garden were unpredictable, and it was often absent for several days. It did not appear to be wholly dependent on peanuts at that time, and after feeding it often flew off strongly out of sight; but from March onwards it was feeding on the peanuts in the garden several times a day on most days. During the last few days of its stay it forsook the peanut feeders and hunted for food in the shrubs and trees.

Acknowledgments

My thanks go to John Cooper and Dr John Newnham for help in preparing this note.

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Ken Hearne
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Jan-Dieter Ludwigs

210. Three Red-billed Choughs *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* at nest 'cave' in Canary Pine *Pinus canariensis* tree near El Paso, La Palma, Canary Islands, May 1999.

Tree-breeding Red-billed Choughs on La Palma

In 1998 and 1999, a pair of Red-billed Choughs *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* nested in a Canary Pine *Pinus canariensis* tree near El Paso, La Palma, Canary Islands (plates 210 & 211). At the beginning of the 1998 breeding season, the nest was occupied by Common Kestrels *Falco tinnunculus*, but the choughs subsequently drove the kestrels away (fresh Common Kestrel eggshells were found under the tree). The nest-site was essentially a 'cave' excavated in a large heap of pine needles which had lodged in a fork of the tree after being shed. Similar 'heaps' of needles occur commonly in Canary Pines on the island. I can find no evidence in the literature for tree-breeding Red-billed Choughs.

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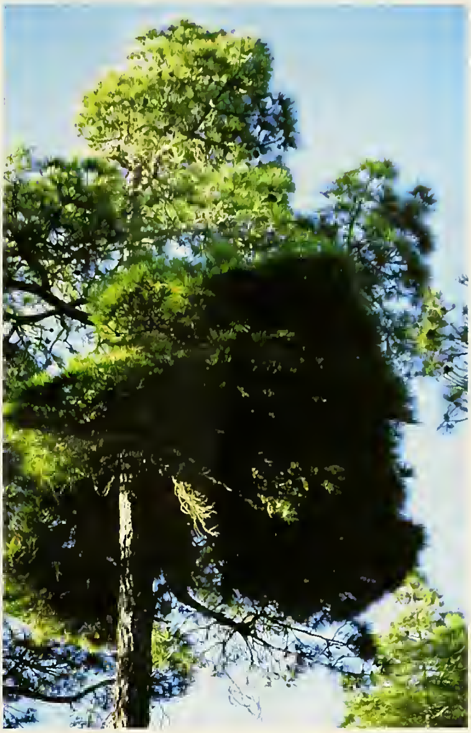

Jan-Dieter Ludwigs

211. Nest-site of Red-billed Choughs *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* in a Canary Pine *Pinus canariensis* tree near El Paso, La Palma, Canary Islands, May 1999.

Some observations on the foraging behaviour of Red-billed Choughs on La Palma, Canary Islands

As a result of detailed studies of Red-billed Choughs *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* on La Palma, Canary Islands, I suggest that many published observations of 'unusual' foraging behaviour are, in fact, not exceptional. It seems that harvesting caterpillars in pinewoods, as recorded by T. Piersma and N. Bloksma (*Bird Study* 34: 127-128), is not an activity that occurs in 'plague' years only, while feeding on top of Bell Heather *Erica cinerea* and Western Gorse *Ulex gallii*, reported by P. Smiddy (*Brit. Birds* 79: 251-252), does not indicate food shortage. I observed these behaviours almost daily during the breeding seasons of 1998 and 1999; neither year was an insect plague year nor was there any obvious food shortage. Furthermore, during April to June it was common to see Red-billed Choughs feeding on larvae at carcasses (goats, pigs and dogs in particular), as reported by R. Dowson in Scotland (*Brit. Birds* 68: 159-160). Rubbish tips were also very common places to see choughs foraging (cf. Haycock & Bullock, *Brit. Birds* 75: 91-92). All of these represent normal behavioural skills of the Red-billed Choughs on La Palma. Indeed, these birds show a range of foraging behaviours commonly shown by other members of the Corvidae (Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*, Carrion Crow *C. corone*, Rook *C. frugilegus* and Magpie *Pica pica*) in Europe and even that of woodpeckers (Picidae) – which do not occur on La Palma; when exploring the tree bark of pine *Pinus* trees (see plates 212 & 213), Red-billed Choughs use their tail in the same way as woodpeckers, pressing it against the bark for support, and bark fragments below many trees indicate the common use of this foraging technique.

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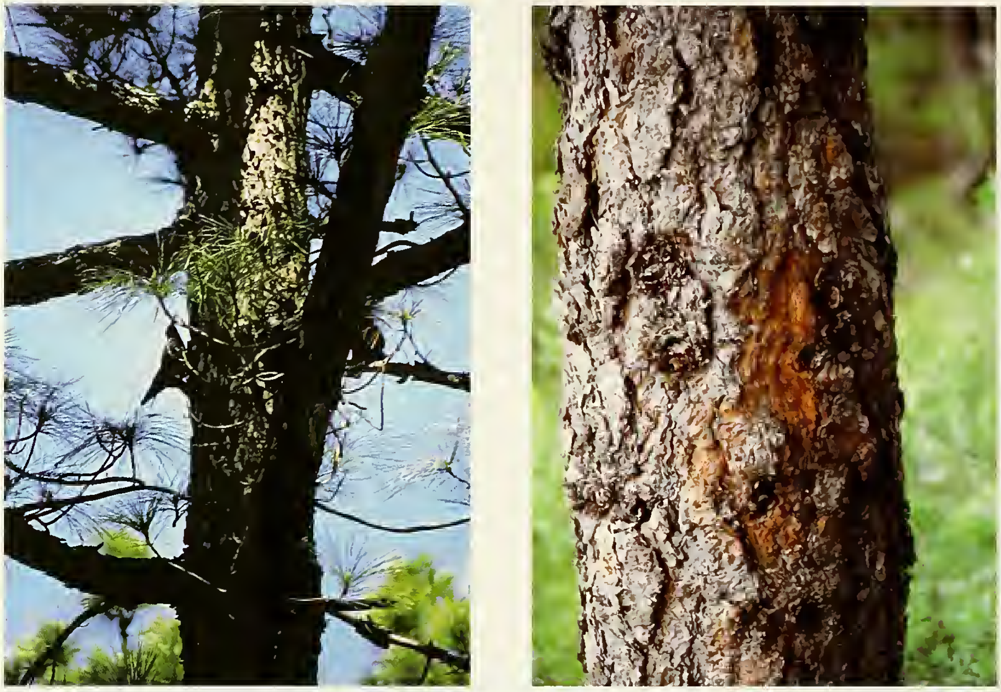

212 & 213. Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* feeding on pine *Pinus* tree in 'woodpecker mode', La Palma, Canary Islands, April 1999 (left); and a close-up of the tree's bark once the chough had moved on.

Rook attempting to seize House Martin in flight

On 9th September 2003, at West Bagborough, Somerset, I saw a small flock of about 20 Rooks *Corvus frugilegus* circling above a copse at a height of about 60 m, while a few House Martins *Delichon urbicum* were flying and feeding nearby. Suddenly, one of the Rooks detached itself from the group and flew speedily towards one of the House Martins, approaching obliquely from above. Contact between the two was made, with the Rook evidently attempting to grasp the House Martin with its feet; the pair grappled with each other for fully ten seconds before the House Martin managed to free itself, to fly off apparently unharmed.

Rooks will kill small birds or mammals on the ground, especially if they are injured. It must, however, be unusual for a Rook to attempt to seize an apparently healthy small bird in flight.

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Common Chaffinch collecting silk

One day in May 2003, at Rostherne Mere NNR, Cheshire, I watched a female Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* alight on the top rail of a five-barred gate on the reserve. The bird then dropped to the second rail, and proceeded to the corner, where there was a spider's web. The Chaffinch began to tug at the web, which repeatedly sprung back, and after several attempts the bird abandoned that approach. To my amazement, the Chaffinch then flew through the web, landed, and then collected the silk from its 'shoulders'. This was repeated twice more, from the third and fourth bars of the gate, before the bird flew off, presumably with a lucrative parcel with which to continue nest-building.

Jack Canovan
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Reviews

UNDERSTANDING BIRD BEHAVIOUR: A BIRDWATCHER'S GUIDE

By Stephen Moss. New
Holland, London, 2003.
160 pages; numerous colour
illustrations.
ISBN 1-84330-151-2.
Hardback, £14.99.

If you have ever wondered what 'copiously illustrated' implies, take a look through Stephen Moss's book. At least half of each of the 160 pages is devoted to illustrations (either photographs or artwork), all of them useful, and those painted by David Daly in particular are an absolute pleasure to look at. Roughly half the book is devoted to brief synopses of aspects of bird behaviour, ranging from flight and feeding, through migration and distribution, to day-to-day physiology. The remainder looks at birds in systematic groupings and aims to highlight the use of aspects of their behaviour to facilitate identification.

If you can cover bird behaviour understandably in 160 pages, roughly half of which are devoted to illustrations, you are doing really well. There are inevitably some problems – for example, bird migration is covered in eight pages, while *The Migration Atlas* uses 880 to explore both our knowledge and lack of it on this topic. Likewise, in three separate places we are told that cormorants and shags (Phalacrocoracidae) do not have waterproof plumage and must stand, wings akimbo, to dry – but without explanation or comment on the problems that this might (or, as it happens, might not, since it lowers energy consumption when submerging) create for a waterbird. Elsewhere, Razorbills *Alca torda* are lumped with Common Guillemots *Uria aalge* as nesting on open cliff-ledges and laying roll-proof, pear-shaped eggs, aspects which are really exclusive to the latter, while Common Ravens *Corvus corax* are 'confined to upland areas'. But these are niggles.

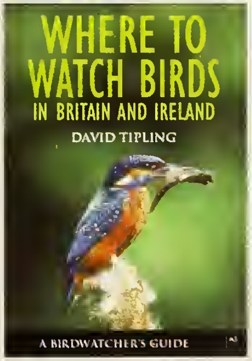
Stephen Moss's text style is fast-moving and readable, and, as the blurb says, jargon-free. But jargon, unless overused, is a necessary component of any text bearing on science, and the enjoyment and understanding of bird behaviour is essentially science-based. At best, the reader still has the 'jargon problem' ahead. Though the selection of topics and examples is clearly personal, what shines through this book is Stephen Moss's enthusiasm for birds and communicating to others about them. The jacket states that this is 'foundation reading for novice birdwatchers'. It is exactly and admirably that, and it is excellent value as well.

Jim Flegg

WHERE TO WATCH BIRDS IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND

By David Tipling. New
Holland, London, 2004.
176 pages; 49 colour plates;
30 maps. ISBN 1-84330-152-0.
Hardback, £14.99.

Here we have another addition to the list of books designed to help you seek out, and get to, potentially rewarding birdwatching sites. This book covers over 300 of the 'most interesting and popular sites in Britain and Ireland', and the impression I have is that the author made his selection from personal experience – which is no bad thing. There are over 30 sites for each of southwest England, East Anglia, southeast England, and northern England, and 24 for the Midlands. Scotland gets deservedly good coverage, with 15 sites in Shetland, 16 in Orkney, and 56 in the rest of Scotland; with a further 23 locations in Wales and 38 in Ireland. Considered to be of particular importance, 20 sites are given special prominence, being spread over two pages, with a map. Consequently, the Isles of Scilly are given the two-page treatment, with eight other Cornish sites compressed into just two and a half pages. Curiously, Minsmere is given just over half a page, yet nearby Walberswick is given expanded coverage with two pages. Each of the sites is given a brief introduction, followed by a list of key birds, access instructions and facilities available. In particular, these include details for the disabled birder. Where appropriate, mention is also made of rare butterflies and mammals that might be encountered.



The book seems to be aimed primarily at beginners (despite the publishers claim that it is a book for all levels); for example, the glossary explains what is meant by 'auk' and 'wild swan', and there are guidelines on how to read a map reference. Nonetheless, despite my nearly 40 years of birding in Britain, there was still much new for me here. As we might expect from the author, the spacious layout is beautifully enhanced by some evocative shots of both birds and habitats, nearly all his. But I was left with the feeling that this book is more likely to find a home on the bookshelf or coffee table, rather than in the back of the car along with all the other usual clutter.

Barry Nightingale

THE BTO NESTBOX GUIDE

By Chris du Feu. BTO,
Thetford, 2003. 78 pages;
colour photographs,
diagrams and tables.
ISBN 1-902576-81-0.
Paperback, £7.99.

The forerunner of this book was published in 1952, as BTO Field Guide No. 3 by Edwin Cohen and Bruce Campbell, and cost two shillings and sixpence! This fifth incarnation is quite different in both content and appearance, being nicely illustrated in colour on almost every page.

After a preface by Graham Evans, of co-sponsors Jacobi Jayne & Co., comes an introduction by David Glue. This outlines the aims of the book and the reason why the provision of nestboxes has become so necessary to hole-nesting species. It explains what makes a good nestbox, and also points out the types of box to be avoided, particularly those combined bird table + nestbox creations so loved by garden centres!

The main text begins with general details of construction, siting and (just as important) annual maintenance of nestboxes. This section is entirely practical, and I would be surprised if there is anyone, no matter how long they have been using nestboxes, who will not learn something new from it. Next comes a section on the value of making observations on the breeding attempts of species using the box, and of making contributions to the BTO's Nest Record Scheme.

The main part of the book consists of detailed nestbox design for those species nesting in proximity to humans. Thus we have small-, medium- and large-hole nestboxes (for tits *Parus* and sparrows *Passer*, Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris*, Tawny Owls *Strix aluco*, etc.); small and large open-fronted boxes (for Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*, Robin *Erithacus rubecula*, Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*, wagtails *Motacilla* and Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*); and finally types suitable for Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica* and House Martins *Delichon urbicum*. For each of these there are exploded diagrams of construction, and often of alternative designs. For each species, details of its distribution, status, nest construction, eggs and breeding cycle are given. For declining species, population indices from the Common Birds Census/Breeding Bird Survey are also given.

In an appendix, all species which may use artificial sites are listed, together with the most appropriate nesting aid. The only misprint I noticed was in this section, where Grey Wagtail *M. cinerea* is listed as using small hole-entrance boxes, where surely small open-fronted was intended.

This book should be on the bookshelves of every school and of every bird lover with a garden, however small, and it should be USED! Despite the author's disclaimer to the contrary, it will surely be the definitive work on the subject for a long time to come.

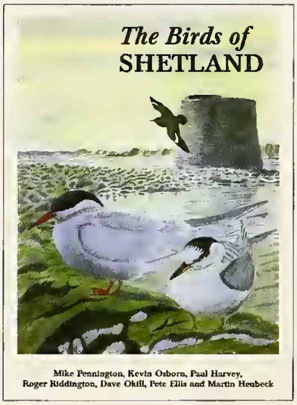
David Warden

THE BIRDS OF SHETLAND

By Mike Pennington, Kevin
Osborn, Paul Harvey, Roger
Riddington, Dave Okill, Pete
Ellis and Martin Heubeck.
Christopher Helm, A&C Black,
London, 2004. 576 pages;
numerous photographs and
line-drawings. ISBN 0-7136-
6038-4. Hardback, £40.00.

How Norway's twitchers must regret their forebears' decision to relinquish control of these islands – the Shetland bird list now approaches that of their entire country. Shortly after sovereignty returned to Scotland, the king's falconer visited Shetland in 1518 to obtain Peregrine Falcons *Falco peregrinus*. This was duly recorded, and Shetland's bird list was up and running. Some 480 years and 430 species later, the culmination of the many thousands of bird records and detailed studies of various species has resulted in this extremely thorough account of Shetland's birds.

The book opens with a geographical overview of Shetland, followed by further chapters on the human impact, breeding birds, wintering birds and migration. Nicely written and mercifully brief, these chapters do paint pictures of Shetland which help to put the birds into context. Another chapter deals with the many birdwatchers who have advanced ornithology in these islands. Remarkably thorough, it lists the many eminent scientists who have visited Shetland as well as the local crofters and fishermen, and gives details of their contributions. While it would have merited being published as a separate entity, it is not out of place here.


The Birds of
SHETLAND
Mike Pennington, Kevin Osborn, Paul Harvey,
Roger Riddington, Dave Okill, Pete Ellis and Martin Heubeck

The systematic list inevitably makes up the vast bulk of this book. Where relevant, the species accounts are divided into sections which deal with historical records, recent status (both breeding and non-breeding), and distribution and movements. Shetland's seabirds, nearly all of which are of national or international importance, have been and continue to be the subject of much intensive study and this is well reflected in the species accounts. The colonisation of the islands by Fulmars *Ful-*

marus glacialis and Great Skuas *Stercorarius skua* makes fascinating reading, as does the recent decline in breeding Kittiwakes *Rissa tridactyla*. In contrast, other groups of breeding birds have been less well studied. Perhaps surprisingly, there appears to be relatively little known about the two endemic subspecies of Wren; *Troglodytes troglodytes zetlandicus* merits just a couple of paragraphs, while the Fair Isle Wren, *T. t. fridariensis*, is covered in a few lines.

The huge number of rare and scarce migrants which make up such a large part of the Shetland list has drawn many a visiting birder to these islands, and Fair Isle in particular. From the days of Eagle Clark through to the present, Shetland has led the world in the study of bird migration, a fact apparent throughout the book. These species accounts are fortunately more than just a list of dates and places. While the attention to detail notable throughout the book is in evidence here, it is not without the anecdotal, which helps lift a text from the merely informative to the interesting. The price of Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* shot on Fair Isle, and the accounts of the finding of the 1990 Pallas's Sandgrouse *Syrrhaptes paradoxus*, the 1983 Hawk Owl *Surnia ulula*, the 1925 Pechora Pipit *Anthus gustavi* and both American Robins *Turdus migratorius* all add value.

The colour photographs are, sadly, grouped together at the start. It would have been nicer to have seen them in the species accounts. Quite a few have been published previously and the reproduction of some of these could have been better. Scattered throughout the text, the vignettes did nothing for me, but I did enjoy the similar scatter of small black-and-white photographs. Gordon Barnes with the 1970 Great Bustard *Otis tarda*, the specimen of the 1936 Ross's Gull *Rhodostethia rosea*, ground-nesting Long-eared Owls *Asio otus* and the last British White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*, an albino, are all great. These illuminate the text, and more of these would have been welcome.

With nearly a century and a half of dedicated fieldwork in Shetland between them, the seven authors are extremely well qualified to have written this book. They should be congratulated for bringing that same dedication to the onerous task of summarising so succinctly the vast amount of knowledge of Shetland's birds into this truly impressive county avifauna.

Richard Schofield

CROW

By Boria Sax. Reaktion Books,
London, 2003. 184 pages;
95 illustrations, 27 in colour.
ISBN 1-86189-194-6
Paperback, £12.95.

In the Book of Genesis, Noah sends forth a raven, which, after flying to and fro for a while, then disappears. This is one of the earliest of countless references to members of the crow family (Corvidae) in religion, folklore, art, literature and popular culture – many of which are included in this delightful and fascinating book. Like so many stories about crows, this story is open to two very different interpretations. Did the fact that the raven failed to return to the Ark signify that land was close, or was it a dereliction of duty, as later scholars generally believed? This question – whether crows are good, evil, or morally ambiguous – runs like a thread throughout the narrative, and provides much food for thought.

Birdwatchers too are ambivalent about crows. We often ignore them, for they are common, widespread and easy to see – rarely presenting the same challenge as, say, warblers or seabirds. But if we set our prejudices aside, and spend some time watching them and learning about their behaviour, there is no doubt that crows are among the most intelligent and fascinating of birds. Our ancestors certainly thought so. In chapters ranging from pre-Biblical Mesopotamia to the present day, Boria Sax writes about everything from medieval warfare to the origin of terms such as 'crow's nest' to describe the ship's lookout. He includes many literary and artistic references: familiar examples, such as Poe's Raven and Ted Hughes's poetry; and less familiar ones, such as the paintings of Gauguin and Picasso, or the iconography of the scarecrow in the film *The Wizard of Oz*.

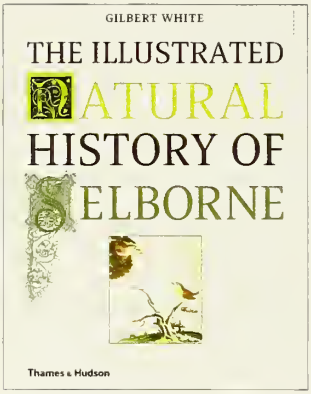
Do not be put off by the broad cultural and historical subject matter of this book; Sax writes in a remarkably clear and fluent style, guiding the reader through unfamiliar material with ease. Even the racist appropriation of crows by the Nazis and segregationist white Americans is covered – I for one was unaware of the Nazi party background of post-war ethologist Konrad Lorenz, which is reflected in his interpretation of Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula* behaviour in *King Solomon's Ring*.

I could go on quoting examples until I run out of space; instead, I suggest that you track down this unusual little book and its companion volumes on such diverse creatures as the Tortoise and the Cockroach. I warmly congratulate the author and publishers on a novel and refreshing approach to the place of wild creatures in human culture and history, which deserves a wide readership.

Stephen Moss

THE ILLUSTRATED NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE

By Gilbert White. Thames & Hudson, London, 2004.
256 pages; 124 colour plates.
ISBN 0-500-284784.
Paperback, £14.95.



There are few natural history books that can be described as classics, but Gilbert White's *The Natural History of Selborne* surely ranks as one of the finest. Since publication in 1789, it has rarely, if ever, been out of print and has appeared in almost 300 editions and reissues, qualifying it as one of the most-published books in the English language. The latest edition, compiled by Ronald Davidson-Houston and introduced by June Chatfield, is an inviting paperback, beautifully illustrated with 124 colour plates reproduced from hand-coloured engravings of Gilbert White's contemporaries.

The text comprises the letters written by White to Thomas Pennant and the Hon. Daines Barrington, two eminent eighteenth-century naturalists. White was fascinated by all aspects of natural history but his letters are particularly rich with information about the birds around his native Hampshire village of Selborne. He describes Honey-buzzards *Pernis apivorus* nesting on the wooded hill behind his house, Stone Curlews *Burhinus oedicnemus* and Wood Larks *Lullula arborea* on the nearby chalk downland, and Grasshopper Warblers *Locustella naevia* singing in his garden. Regrettably, none of these species can be found around the village today but such comparisons are one of the features that make the book so attractive. It is like opening a birdwatching time capsule. One is transported back over 200 years to the English countryside long before the Common Agricultural Policy was a gleam in the bureaucrat's eye.

The book has been remarkably influential. James Fisher once described White as 'the man who started us all birdwatching'. This accolade echoes the words of Charles Darwin who, having read the book as a young man, came away with a much greater appreciation of wildlife and started making detailed observations of birds. He later wrote in his autobiography that, from reading White's *Selborne*..., he wondered 'why every gentleman did not become an ornithologist'.

White illustrated his first edition with drawings of Selborne commissioned from the Swiss artist Samuel Hieronymous Grimm. The new edition is enlivened by coloured engravings of birds, insects, animals and plants by eighteenth century naturalist artists including Buffon, Donovan and Pennant. The illustrations help to lift and modernise the book, adding to the vividness of White's text. *The Natural History of Selborne* has always been a great book but, in its latest guise, it is a very attractive one as well.

John Eyre

FIFTY YEARS OF BIRDWATCHING: MEMORIES AND RECORDS 1953-2003

Edited by Terry Hicks and Brianne Reeve. Shoreham District Ornithological Society, 2003. 200 pages; photographs and line-drawings.
ISBN 0-9546710-01.
Paperback/spiral bound, £15.00.

Written 'to celebrate the achievements which came from the formation of a small society in 1953', the bulk of this book, and the part best meeting its aim, is a series of nearly 60 'life history' essays. These vary in length from a few lines to five pages each and were written by an impressively high proportion of SDOS's 150 members. Often more *Birds* magazine territory than *BB*, most readers are nonetheless likely to find something of interest among the articles, although not all relate to the society's area and Tony Marr's *From Pagham Harbour to Denzil Harber* was published in this journal (*Brit. Birds* 96: 132-134). The SDOS probably differs little from other societies of a similar size and age, and this adds to this book's attraction, though in the 'my first optics' category the use of a World War II tank periscope ('magnification was brilliant, everything else was terrible') is probably exceptional!

The first third of the book documents the society's history (at its most popular in the early 1970s, it was nearly disbanded a decade later and, like many others today, suffers from an ageing membership), the Shoreham Sanctuary (a small copse/ringing reserve) and ringing in the area (illustrated with many graphs and tables). A section on notable bird sightings includes Gyr Falcon *Falco rusticolus* and Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius* but has evident errors and omissions (e.g. the June 1986 Richard's Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae* was actually in January 1956, a 1986 Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* is not mentioned, while a Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides* in 1989 – found by the reviewer before collecting wife and newborn daughter from hospital – is listed as a Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*).

The book is illustrated throughout with line-drawings and photographs, and the Sky Lark

Alauda arvensis on the front cover is superb – one can almost hear it singing. Some photographs will be familiar to readers (e.g. Eric Hosking's Barn Owl *Tyto alba*) while the inclusion of others (Black Grouse *Tetrao tetrix* and breeding Slavonian Grebe *Podiceps auritus*) seems inappropriate in a south-coast publication. Fascinating sepia-tinted prints of early observers include the late Chris Mead exiting an uncomfortably small looking Mini in 1964 and an almost unrecognisable Tony Marr aged 13; but it is a big disappointment that the book's few habitat shots are not of a similar vintage.

The concept is a good one, and something which societies approaching a significant anniversary should seriously consider emulating; but I felt that this volume was let down slightly by the fact that not all of the content is strictly relevant to the SDOS's area. It is available from SDOS Publications, 7 Berberis Court, Shoreham-by-Sea, West Sussex BN43 6JA (p&p £2.00).

Richard Fairbank

BIRD-FRIENDLY GARDEN

By Stephen Moss.
HarperCollins, London, 2004.
144 pages; many colour photographs and illustrations.
ISBN 0-00-716935-3.
Paperback, £9.99.

In the last ten years there has been a huge upsurge in interest in garden birds, which reflects the increasing importance of this habitat for a number of species. With this interest there has come a plethora of advice on gardening for birds from ornithological societies, seed merchants, horticultural and wildlife experts. This book aims to provide a month-by-month guide to attracting birds to your garden. It is divided into sections dealing with different sizes of gardens, the bird calendar, caring for birds, and a plant and bird directory.

The bird calendar would perhaps have been better dealt with on a seasonal basis rather than month by month, as then there could have been a wider consideration of the climatic, ornithological and gardening variations between regions. In the caring for birds section, there are useful notes on feeding, predators and the potential problems for baby birds. The nestbox section deals only with bought boxes and there is little information about how to make your own, although readers are referred to the RSPB website or the new *BTO Nestbox Guide* (see above). Basic details such as the size of entrance holes for different species are not discussed.

The plant directory deals with a range of trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants. I am not at all convinced that the more exotic grasses and shrubs are beloved by our garden birds other than perhaps for cover, while some plants which are – such as willows *Salix*, beeches *Fagus* or oaks *Quercus* – are missing from the detailed descriptions. Notes on propagation would have been useful as most bird gardeners that I know enjoy obtaining plants for free.

The bird identification section misses out species such as Lesser Black-backed *Larus fuscus* and Herring Gulls *L. argentatus* (although they are mentioned in the text in other sections) but includes rarer garden birds such as Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis* and Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*. The illustrations are adequate but you would be hard pushed to identify Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* from Common Chiffchaff *P. collybita* using this guide. The illustrations generally include females and juveniles where they have different plumages and this will greatly help the new enthusiast, but the inclusion of the North European forms of Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* and Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus* is unnecessary. There is a small distribution map with each species but Shetland, Scilly and the Channel Islands have been omitted.

This is decidedly a book for the beginner in bird gardening, and I feel that more experienced gardeners will gain little from it.

Dave Okill

Obituaries

Colin James Oliver Harrison (1926-2003)

Colin Harrison was one of the most talented and least appreciated British ornithologists of his generation. Born in London, he gained a scholarship to a local grammar school and at first worked in a government testing laboratory, then as a librarian and school teacher. He had been interested in birds since childhood, and was soon publishing numerous notes. At this time, in the 1950s, he joined the Cambridge expeditions to study autumn migration in Norway, and later jointly authored the last report and summary of the results (*Sterna* 23, 29). He went on to secure a post in the Bird Room at the British Museum (Natural History), where he was placed in charge of the egg collection. This led to the publication of many notes and books about the nests and eggs of both European and North American birds.

He found, however, that eggs provided limited scope for expressing his talents, and quickly joined the group in the Bird Room studying bird behaviour, both in the field and in captivity. Their publications in *British Birds* and the *Avicultural Magazine* did not require stuffy and cumbersome official approval. In turn, this led to an increasing interest in biogeography and the sadly neglected avian palaeontological collections (unfortunately housed in a different department, which necessitated regular trips from Tring to London). Working through these with Cyril Walker, he produced a further stream of publications. His research on distribution is summarised in the *Atlas of the Birds of the Western Palearctic* (Collins, 1982), while his palaeontological findings are written up in the *History of the Birds of Britain* (Collins, 1988), the latter an important book which failed to receive the attention it rightly deserved.

In particular, Colin's palaeontological work involved investigations into the early northwest European Eocene avifauna from places like Trafalgar Square, and a revision of the more recent prehistoric British collections from caves and other archaeological sites. Through his biogeographical work, he went on to demonstrate that the evolution of the present Palaearctic avifauna came about through segregation of populations into western, central and eastern refugia during the glaciations. In this, Colin's contribution to ornithology was unique.

Personally, Colin was stocky, hairy, generous, and very good company, with a wide variety of interests. He did not seek the spotlight, being strangely defensive about his work and reluctant to discuss it. This was a pity, since his friends were always happy to help iron out the occasional problems with minor details. Instead, he developed as a back-room boy, sitting on committees and acting as an advisor to various official and voluntary bodies. As with several other leading ornithologists, I attribute this to lack of a university education, since whatever one may think of universities, they should do three things, inspire confidence, instil critical standards, and provide marketable qualifications. While he eventually gained a PhD in his 40s, it was a bit late.

W. R. P. Bourne

Paul Alexander Zino (1916-2004)

✓✓ (53177-1)

Alec Zino was a major pioneer in the study and conservation of the birds of Madeira, one of which he rediscovered and almost single-handedly resurrected from the dead. Although born into a family with commercial interests in the island, he was educated in England. In his youth he was a great sailor, fisherman and hunter, holding the all-time record for shooting 32 of the elusive local Red-legged Partridges *Alectoris rufa* over his dog in a day, and taking an oar with the local whalers. He underwent a Pauline conversion when invited by his friend Gerry Maul, Curator of Funchal Museum, to cook for a multi-disciplined expedition to the uninhabited Selvagen (Salvage) Islands, between Madeira and the Canary Islands, in 1963. It was here that he met two Frenchmen, Christian Jouanin and Francois Roux, which led to lifelong collaboration in the study of the local seabirds.

When he returned to the Selvagens in his yacht *Yam Seng*, in 1967, the lessors of the traditional right to take young Cory's Shearwaters *Calonectris diomedea* complained that the fishermen were poaching too many, and agreed to let Alec take over the lease to stop the trade. His family built a house in the islands and started ringing Cory's Shearwaters; they began the first detailed study of the shearwaters' breeding biology (*Ibis* 113: 212-217) and this work has continued ever since. The Portuguese Government eventually bought the islands, but initially provided no protection for breeding seabirds. Then, in 1976, following wild talk after the revolution, fishermen began to slaughter the birds. Alec secured a television film of the carnage, leading to protection and, eventually, inclusion of the islands in the Parque Natural de Madeira in 1986.

Alec also made visits to the Desertas Islands to the east of Madeira, where he studied Fea's Petrels *Pterodroma feae* nesting on Bugio, the outermost island. This aroused his curiosity about the smaller petrel *P. madeira*, originally found nesting among the upper peaks of the main island in 1903, but not described as

214. Alec Zino. Photo from family collection.

distinct until 1934, by which time the site had been forgotten. Alec played recordings of the voice of Fea's Petrel to the local people, which led to rediscovery of the location. Inadvertently, he told a collector about this discovery, who then trapped several birds; fortunately, Alec caught him in time to release most of the birds he had taken (*Bull. B. O. C.* 124: 3). He and his family have since led the fight to protect the few score remaining birds from cats and rats, and secure the site and the Desertas as nature reserves. Seldom can it have been more appropriate to name the wonderful bird they rediscovered and saved after them: Zino's Petrel. The Zino family have also studied the endemic Trocaz Pigeon *Columba trocaz*, and co-authored the best checklist of the island (*Bol. Mus. Mun. Funchal* 47 (262): 63-100).

Personally Alec was a big man, handsome, charming, intelligent, cultivated, scholarly, industrious and generous, indeed almost too generous, as described above. He was most frustrated when arthritis limited his activity latterly, but remained bright and interested to the end. He was given a Certificate of Merit by the UK Minister for Agriculture in 1988, made a Comendador do Infante Dom Henrique (Henry the Navigator, cousin of Henry V) and awarded the Gold Medal of the Town of Funchal in 1990 for his work on conservation. He leaves a wife, Yvonne, four children and ten grandchildren, and was about to become a great-grandfather. His son, Dr Frank Zino, is continuing his work.

W. R. P. Bourne

News and comment

Compiled by Adrian Pitches

Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of *British Birds*

Danube blues

D. W. Greenslade

215. White Pelicans *Pelecanus onocrotalus*, Danube Delta, July 1975.

The government of Ukraine has ignored international protests and commissioned the construction of a canal through the Danube Delta. The initial dredging of a 3-km, deep-water channel through the Bystroye estuary on the Black Sea coast began in mid May. More than 20,000 pairs of birds breed in the Delta, including the globally threatened Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus*. The Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) estimates that 70% of the world's White Pelican *P. onocrotalus* population and 50% of the world's Pygmy Cormorants *Phalacrocorax pygmeus* breed in the delta. In some years, up to 7% of the world population of Red-breasted Geese *Branta ruficollis* winters in the area, and one of the world's rarest waders, Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris*, possibly still occurs on migration.

The Danube Delta, which straddles the border of Romania and Ukraine, covers around 400,000 ha and is a Ramsar wetland site, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and an Important Bird Area. The Ukraine Government, which hopes that the canal will bring more shipping to the country, approved the project last autumn and the full 170-km length of the canal is due to be completed by 2008. In a joint letter, with WWF and Wetlands International, to the President of Ukraine, BirdLife has stressed the need for alternative, more eco-friendly schemes to be adopted. At the very least, BirdLife wants the project to be halted until proper environmental impact assessments have been carried out. The text of the letter can be seen on the website of the Ukrainian Union for Bird Conservation (UTOP) at www.utop.org.ua/eng/news25.htm

Links: BirdLife (www.birdlife.org/news/news/2004/05/danube_canal.html);
Ramsar
(www.ramsar.org/w.n.ukraine_danube_wwfdanube.htm).

A bridge too far?

The RSPB has warned that construction of the world's longest suspension bridge – across the Strait of Messina, between Sicily and Italy – will put thousands of migrating birds at risk. The Society claims that the economic case for the road and rail crossing is not proven, and that up to 5,000 birds risk flying into the structure every day. The 3.3-km bridge, with its 400-m high pylons and iron cables, will traverse an area characterised by high winds and one that is prone to earthquakes.

Dr Mark Avery, Director of Conservation at the RSPB, said: 'It is appalling that the EU has made this a priority transport project; the European Commission and the Italian Government should think again. The environmental impact assessment was totally inadequate, [the bridge] will be disastrous for wildlife and could irreversibly damage the valuable habitats that the Messina area boasts.'

The Strait of Messina is the third most important bird migration route in southern Europe after Gibraltar and the Bosporus. It is renowned for its raptor passage (see *Brit. Birds* 94: 196-202; 97: 238-246), and the RSPB warns that raptors such as Honey-buzzards *Pernis apivorus*, Black Kites *Milvus migrans*, Hobbies *Falco subbuteo* and Red-footed Falcons *F. vespertinus* are particularly at risk because of the high winds and cables, which the birds may be unable to avoid. Construction will also endanger millions of smaller birds, including chats, warblers and flycatchers, which migrate at night and could be disorientated by the bridge's strong lights.

Three major wildlife sites will be damaged by the project. One, the Laghi di Ganzirri e Faro, a coastal wetland on the Messina coast, is also a Special Protection Area, a site ring-fenced for wildlife by the EU Birds Directive. In addition, BirdLife regards the Strait of Messina as an area which is internationally important for birds. Dr Avery said: 'This bridge should not be built. The environmental damage will be considerable and it will be of very limited use. There is already an efficient public sea ferry system and the money for the bridge should be used to improve that instead.'

The Messina bridge is one of 30 transport 'priority projects' forming an EU initiative called the trans-European transport network (TEN-T). In total, these projects will cost £154 billion (€220 billion) between now and 2020, a sum to be funded partly by European taxpayers. Of course, the Special Protection Area is an EU designation – but EU money will fund its degradation. But will the bridge be such a disaster for wildlife? There are suspension bridges across many major waterways, such as the Humber Bridge in eastern England. There is little evidence that this structure is killing large numbers of migrants on the North Sea coast.

Sociable Lapwing desperately seeking friends

The global population of the Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* has declined by approximately 95% within the last 15 years and may now be as low as 200 pairs. In response, BirdLife has launched a new action plan to help save what is now one of Eurasia's most threatened bird species, which breeds only in northern Kazakhstan and bordering regions of Russia.

The population crash of this steppe-dwelling species coincides with the political breakdown of the Soviet Union, which brought about considerable changes in land use. There is, however, still no clear evidence of what is causing the Sociable Lapwing's decline. Preliminary studies by ACBK (the Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity in Kazakhstan), with support from NABU (BirdLife in Germany) in the central Kazakhstan Tengiz Lakes region, Kazakhstan's key Important Bird Area, have led to the discovery of two small colonies of Sociable Lapwings. This year, these two remaining colonies will be studied intensively to identify the birds' habitat needs and the reasons for their decline. The results of the study will be used to develop a larger-scale conservation research and management project in a bid to understand and halt the global decline of the Sociable Lapwing and its steppe habitats.

Intriguingly, degradation of the steppe in the post-Communist era has coincided with an upsurge in records of birds from this region reaching western Europe, notably Pallid Harriers *Circus macrourus* and last year's Black Lark *Melanocorypha yeltoniensis* on Anglesey. Might this be in some way connected to habitat loss, so that these steppe species are displaced as far west as Britain?

Better news from Iraq

The Canadian Government has stepped in with $3 million to help restore the Mesopotamian marshes in southern Iraq. As well as helping the repatriation of former inhabitants of the region – the 'Marsh Arabs' – the scheme will also help to improve the outlook for the region's unique birds. The Mesopotamian marshes are one of the largest wetland areas in the Middle East, proving a vital stopover for thousands of waterbirds on migration and during the winter months. They are also recognised by BirdLife as an Endemic Bird Area. During the 1990s, the wetlands were reduced to just 7% of their original size, owing to dam construction upstream in Turkey, Syria and Iraq.

Almost the entire world population of the Basra Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus griseldis* breeds in the Mesopotamian marshes and one other site in Iran. Its numbers are thought to have declined by up to 80% since the 1970s, according to Adnan Budieri, Head of BirdLife's Middle East & Central Asia Division. Its conservation status has recently been upgraded to Endangered, mainly as a result of the destruction and degradation of its breeding reedbed habitat. The species now faces a very real threat of extinction within the next few years. As soon as the situation is stable enough, BirdLife plans to visit the area to find out the full extent of the predicament facing this and other Iraqi species.

And a birding despatch from Iraq by Frank Gardner

A poignant note was received this month from Colin Richardson in the UAE, who forwarded a message from BBC News security correspondent Frank Gardner (Gardner was critically injured in a shooting in Saudi Arabia on 6th June, which claimed the life of his cameraman colleague, Simon Cumbers). Colin says: 'We shouldn't forget that Frank was a keen and experienced birder. I thought people might be interested in a message I received from him in Iraq on 9th May 2003, probably the first bird report to come out of Iraq for many years.' Here it is in full:

'Greetings from HQ 7th Armoured Brigade, which just happens to be in a fabulous former palace of Saddam's. Moats, orchards and scrub, it's a paradise for birds. The air is filled with a flock of Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters *Merops persicus* that have been here a week now. The European variety [*M. apiaster*] are still around in small numbers. First to wake up in the morning are the Red-Wattled Lapwings *Hoplopterus indicus*, which are making a fearful racket. But there's also a pair of White-tailed Lapwings *Vanellus leucurus* here, beautiful birds with long, trailing yellow legs. Outside the cookhouse there's a Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* sharing the same tree as a Lesser Grey Shrike *L. minor* and just behind the ammunitions dump there's a pair of Common Babblers *Turdoides caudatus* hiding. A flock of Yellow-throated Sparrows *Petronia xanthocollis* is on the ground, mingling with the odd Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis* and I've seen a solitary Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*. Fishing from the moat are three Pied Kingfishers *Ceryle rudis* and just across the Shatt Al-Arab I've seen Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* and White-breasted Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis* in the date palms. One surprise for me is to see Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus* here (they wake us up in London at weekends!), but the highlight has been a stunning Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* swimming round in circles on a lake out near the oil refinery.'

Oldest bird club

Congratulations in the first instance to the West Midland Bird Club, which is this year celebrating its 75th birthday. News of this particular milestone prompted a search for the oldest bird club in the UK.

Former N&c compiler Bob Scott pointed out that the universities of Oxford and Cambridge spawned clubs in the 1920s – the Oxford Ornithological Society dates back to 1921, and the Cambridgeshire Bird Club to 1925. The Society for the Protection of Birds was formed in 1889 by a band of ladies protesting against the use of Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* feathers in the millinery trade. It became the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in 1904 – so 2004 also marks the RSPB's centenary. The British Ornithologists' Union is far older, having been founded in 1858.

But arguably the oldest bird club in the country is found in northeast England. Formed in 1829, the Natural History Society of Northumbria has just embarked on its 175th birthday celebrations! The society has always had an ornithological section, and although northeast England now has three county bird clubs, the society still produces an annual report on the birds of the Farne Islands in Northumberland (in conjunction with the National Trust). The society's Hancock Museum in Newcastle is named after the Victorian naturalist/collector brothers John and Albany Hancock, and houses one of the finest bird skin collections of any British regional museum.

Links: Oldest Bird Clubs (www.westmidlandbirdclub.com/club/older.htm); Hancock Museum (www.twmuseums.org.uk/hancock).

History of Hereford Orn. Soc.

A mere stripling by comparison with the oldest clubs listed above, Hereford Ornithological Society turned 50 in 2000. A history of the club's first 50 years has now been published and is available from the author: HOS president Ifor Evans, 12 Brockington Drive, Tupsley, Hereford HR1 1TA (price £10.00). This is a meticulously detailed history, with appendices listing every committee member, field trip and guest lecturer over the entire period. In 1954, the Herefordshire list stood at 233 species, and by 2000 it had advanced by just 19 species to 252. Such is the challenge of birding in a landlocked county! When the HOS was founded, breeding Corn Crakes *Crex crex* were to be found in the county, while the booklet also records a little-known Red Kite *Milvus milvus* reintroduction attempt which predated the English Nature programme by 30 years. This latter was a private enterprise effort in Radnorshire by a Captain Gilbert who sourced his young birds from Spain (just like the first EN birds taken to the Chilterns).

Bald Ibises tagged

Most of the world's Bald Ibises *Geronticus eremita* breed in the Souss-Massa National Park, on the Atlantic coast of Morocco. Outside the breeding season, however, little is known about the birds' movements and, without this information, it has been impossible to identify measures for the year-round conservation of this Critically Endangered species.

Many of the birds disappear for weeks at a time in the winter months, and very little is known about their movements, and potential threats to survival, at this time. But now, a team comprised of staff from the National Park and SEO/BirdLife Spain, in collaboration with Spain's Ministry of the Environment, has succeeded for the first time ever in trapping and fitting three Bald Ibises (two adults and a juvenile) with satellite tracking devices, which will provide important new data about their lives in the non-breeding season.

Provisional figures from the 2004 breeding season (relayed by Park staff to Chris Bowden at the RSPB) are that 98 pairs attempted to breed, producing one chick per pair on average. A similar number of pairs produced a similar number of young in 2003, which should maintain the healthy population increase of the past five years.

IVF for Golden Eagles?

Researchers at the University of Abertay, in Dundee, have become the first in the world to breed a Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* successfully using frozen sperm (in the same week in late May, it emerged that a healthy human baby was born in Manchester two years ago, using sperm that had been frozen for 21 years). Christened Crystal, the eagle chick was bred by falconer Andrew Knowles-Brown and bird reproduction expert Dr Graham Wishart. This could be a significant step towards developing techniques to safeguard some of the world's most endangered raptors.

Dr Wishart said: 'There are all sorts of obstacles to breeding raptors in captivity through natural methods. The birds may not be ready to breed at the same time and, in the case of endangered species, it might be difficult to match up a breeding pair if the few remaining individuals are scattered across continents. Freezing sperm allows us to store it in perpetuity, so that not only can we wait for optimum breeding conditions, but also the possibility of trans-national breeding programmes for extremely rare birds is opened up.'

The team's first, rather questionable, attempt was in May 2001, when Wishart and Knowles-Brown produced the world's first eagle born with cryopreserved sperm, a hybrid Golden × Steppe Eagle *A. nipalensis*. Following discussions in Spain with Dr Juan Blanco at the Centre for the Study of Iberian Raptors, Wishart and Knowles-Brown refined their freezing rate and cryopreservative to improve the survival of Golden Eagle sperm. Knowles-Brown, who is chairman of the Scottish Hawking Club, said: 'To be able to have a sustainable captive population of any species of eagle, which allows it to be studied, can only be of benefit to the wild population.' In April, Andrew Knowles-Brown also bred the first captive-reared White-tailed Eagles *Haliaeetus albicilla* in the UK (as distinct from the young birds reintroduced to the wild on Rhum).

Robins killed at garden centre

A garden centre has done something akin to insulting the late Queen Mother, by killing a family of Robins *Erithacus rubecula* which, it was claimed, threatened food hygiene. The Wyevale garden centre in Milbury Heath, north of Bristol, culled two chicks and one adult bird in May after they entered the cafeteria area. Staff at the centre were granted permission by the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to kill the Robins after they were seen flying in and out of air vents close to food-serving and eating areas. But, after the RSPCA and the RSPB raised concerns about the deaths, the government department announced that it was reviewing the incident. In a statement, Wyevale Garden Centres, a national chain based in Hereford, apologised for any distress caused by the cull, and claimed that its actions were taken to comply with the Food Safety Act 1990. Defra said that the application for a licence to kill the birds was only awarded after it was considered by an experienced wildlife management adviser. Bristol birders will be familiar with a football chant which Rovers fans direct at their City rivals – the City mascot is a Robin, and the chant involves the death of the bird...

Chopper Harris flies to Fergie's side

As Euro 2004 draws to a close in Portugal, cast your mind back to the FA Cup Final at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff in May. You may have been unaware that 'Chopper Harris' was employed as a defender for both Manchester United and Millwall. This was not the legendary – and brutal – Chelsea defender of the 1960s and 1970s, however, even though he certainly did possess a killer instinct as a player. The Harris who graced Cardiff in May was a Harris's Hawk *Parabuteo unicinctus*. The stadium employs a falconer from a pest control business to prevent Feral Pigeons *Columba livia* setting up home beneath its retractable roof. Apparently, the Harris's Hawk is favoured for this line of work (another keeps the pigeons off the spruced-up government buildings in Whitehall) because this species will hunt in pairs, or even larger groups, one of the very few raptors to do so. An evocative account of Harris's Hawks can be found on the following website: www.greglasley.net/harrishawk.html

Slavs in colour

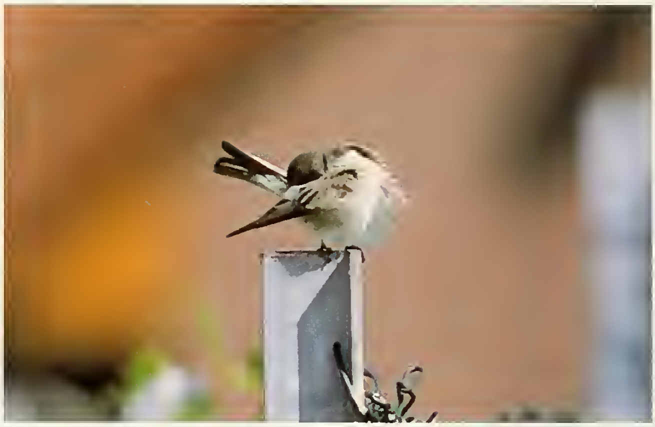
'There are ten Golden Eagles *Aquila chrysaetos* and four Ospreys *Pandion haliaetus* for every Slavonian Grebe *Podiceps auritus* in Scotland.' This attention-grabbing fact comes from the new all-colour species update for 2003 from RSPB North Scotland, *Slavonian Grebes*. In 2003, 37 young fledged with a productivity figure of 0.86 young per territorial pair, the fourth best on record since monitoring began in 1971, although only 15 lochs were occupied, compared with at least 30 in the 1980s. Work is currently underway to answer a wide range of questions including where the Scottish birds winter, at what age do they breed first, and their life expectancy. For more information – and offers to volunteer for monitoring work – contact Stuart Benn, RSPB Scotland, North Regional Office (01463) 715000; e-mail: stuart.benn@rspb.org.uk

Correction

Plate 152 in the June 2004 issue (page 262) showed a 'Black Brant' *Branta bernicla nigricans* alongside a dark-bellied Brent Goose *B. b. bernicla*, not a pale-bellied bird as captioned. The Editorial team apologises for this proofing error.

Monthly Marathon

Photo no. 207: Spotted Flycatcher



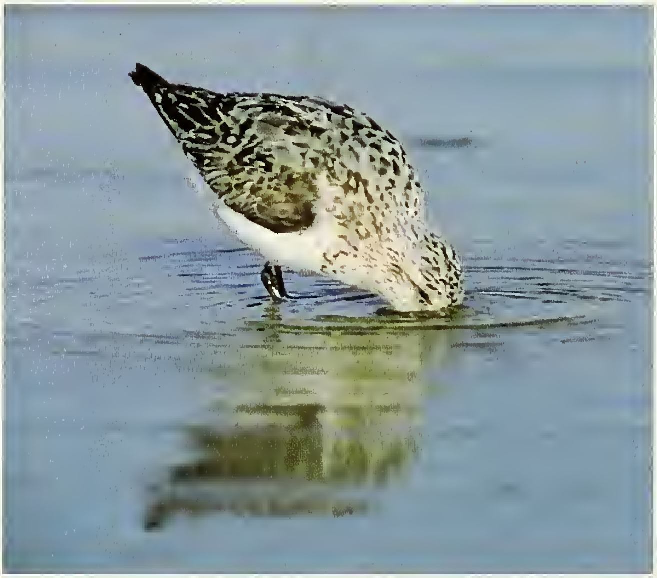
Olaf Lessow

216. Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*, Germany, August 1998.

Monthly Marathon photo number 207 (*Brit. Birds* 97: plate 114, repeated here as plate 216) is easily recognisable as a passerine. From what we can see of the upperparts, it appears to have a brown/grey nape and mantle, its tertials and greater coverts are dark-centred with contrasting buff fringes on the outer webs, and there is a hint of a wing panel formed by pale edges to the secondaries. The underparts look fairly plain, although the strong sunlight has 'burnt out' any features on the chest. The tail, although splayed slightly as the bird preens, appears square-ended. The legs seem to be dark, even though they are in shadow, and although the feathers on the belly are obscuring them slightly, they still look quite short. I warned against the problems of judging features from a single photograph only last month (*Brit. Birds* 97: 312), but one feature that does appear obvious on our mystery bird is its primary projection. It looks long-winged, with the exposed primaries being almost equal in length to the tertials.

With this combination of features we can rule out various species groups. Many warblers (Sylviidae) are as plain as our bird, but various features can help eliminate this group. The members of some genera, including *Acrocephalus*, *Hippolais* and *Locustella*, can appear long-winged but none of them would show the combination of short dark legs, neatly fringed tertials and greater coverts, shortish undertail-coverts and the general coloration shown here. Some sparrows (Passeridae) and finches (Fringillidae) are as plain as the mystery bird, and Pale Rock Sparrow *Carpospiza brachydactyla* and Mongolian *Bucanetes mongolicus* and Trumpeter Finches *B. githagineus* all show a relatively long primary projection. They all have pale legs, however, and should show either longer undertail coverts or a notched tail, with Pale Rock Sparrow having white tips to the tail feathers.

Having said all this, our bird just doesn't have the 'feel' of a warbler or a sparrow, and to most birders its shape, although awkward, would point towards a chat (Turdidae) or a flycatcher (Muscicapidae). Several wheatears *Oenanthe* are long-winged with uniform upperparts and paler underparts, but this bird lacks the classic wheatear tail pattern. Desert Wheatear *O. deserti*, which does have an all-dark tail, would look shorter-tailed; and anyway the legs are too short for this species. Those short legs do, in fact, look good for a flycatcher; furthermore, with our bird's plain appearance, the only real contenders are the *Muscicapa* and *Empidonax* flycatchers.



217. 'Monthly Marathon'. Photo no. 210. Eighth stage in thirteenth 'Marathon'. Identify the species. Read the rules (see page 54), then send in your answer on a postcard to Monthly Marathon, c/o The Banks, Mountfield, Robertsbridge, East Sussex TN32 5JY, or by e-mail to editor@britishbirds.co.uk, to arrive by 31st August 2004.

Monthly Marathon

Three species of 'empid' have been recorded in the Western Palearctic to date: last autumn's records of Least *E. minimus* and Alder Flycatcher *E. alnorum* from Iceland joining the record of Acadian Flycatcher *E. virescens* from the same country in November 1967. All three differ from the bird in plate 216 in a number of ways: they are more olive-/green-toned above, with more contrasting black wings and yellow-/white-tipped greater coverts; they are also usually 'dirtier' looking on the underparts; and also, the first two show shorter wings than our mystery bird.

Of the two *Muscicapa* members on the Western Palearctic List, Brown Flycatcher *M. dauurica* shows a distinctly shorter primary projection than our bird, which leaves us, finally, with Spotted Flycatcher *M. striata*.

James Lidster

Two-thirds of contestants judged this month's puzzle correctly, and the results leave us with a leading group of five in the present 'Marathon', all with a sequence of five correct answers.

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Recent reports

Compiled by Barry Nightingale and Anthony McGeehan

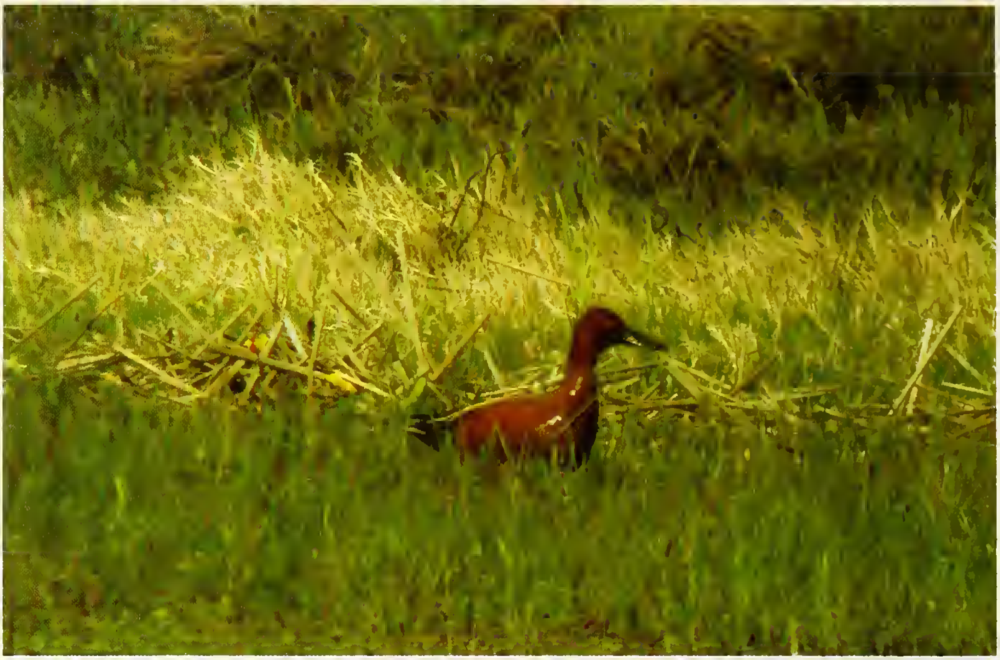
This summary of unchecked reports covers mid May to mid June 2004.

Bufflehead *Bucephala albeola* Lewis (Western Isles), 20th May; Branston Gravel-pits, 24th May, same Drayton Bassett Gravel-pits, 25th-26th May and 4th-9th June, same Whitemoor Haye/Croxall Gravel-pits (all Staffordshire), 31st May to 2nd June. **White-billed Diver** *Gavia adamsii* Coll (Argyll), 22nd-23rd May; Cransdale (Northeast Scotland), 23rd May; North Roe (Shetland), 26th May.

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* Messingham (Lincolnshire), 1st-2nd June. **Night Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax* Kendal (Cumbria), 28th May; Denso Marston NR (West Yorkshire), 7th-9th June. **Squacco Heron** *Ardeola ralloides* Porthmellon (Cornwall), 31st May to 4th June; Blithfield Reservoir (Staffordshire), 31st May; Dengemarsh (Kent), 3rd June, presumed same Minnis Bay (Kent), 4th June, and perhaps same Abberton Reservoir (Essex), 5th June. **Purple Heron** *Ardea purpurea* Elmley (Kent), 14th-15th May; Horse Eye Levels (East Sussex), 15th May; Pagham Harbour (West Sussex), 16th May; Gibraltar Point (Lincolnshire), 20th May; Minsmere (Suffolk), 21st-31st May and 10th June; Welney (Norfolk), 30th May to 2nd June; Loch of Strathbeg (Northeast Scotland), 3rd June; Minnis Bay, 4th June.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans* Deal (Kent), 12th May; Dungeness (Kent), 12th May; Minsmere, 13th May; Margate (Kent), 14th May; Millersford Bottom (Hampshire), 15th May; Fairfield (Kent), 17th May; Papercourt (Surrey), 19th May; Sandwich Bay (Kent), 24th May; Achentoul (Highland), 3rd-5th June; Budleigh Salterton (Devon), 6th June; Boscastle (Cornwall), 7th-8th June; Portland (Dorset), 7th June; Great Ryburgh (Norfolk), 7th June; Marshchapel and Saltfleetby (Lincolnshire), 10th June. **White-tailed Eagle** *Haliaeetus albicilla* Navax Point (Cornwall), 24th May. **Red-footed Falcon** *Falco vespertinus* South Stack (Anglesey), 11th May; Selsey Bill (West Sussex), 12th May; Carsington Water (Derbyshire), 19th May; Snettisham (Norfolk), 22nd May; Cocking (West Sussex), 27th May; Hickling Broad (Norfolk), 28th May to 3rd June; Winterton (Norfolk), 30th May; Minsmere, 2nd-6th June; Burgh St Peter (Norfolk), 5th June.

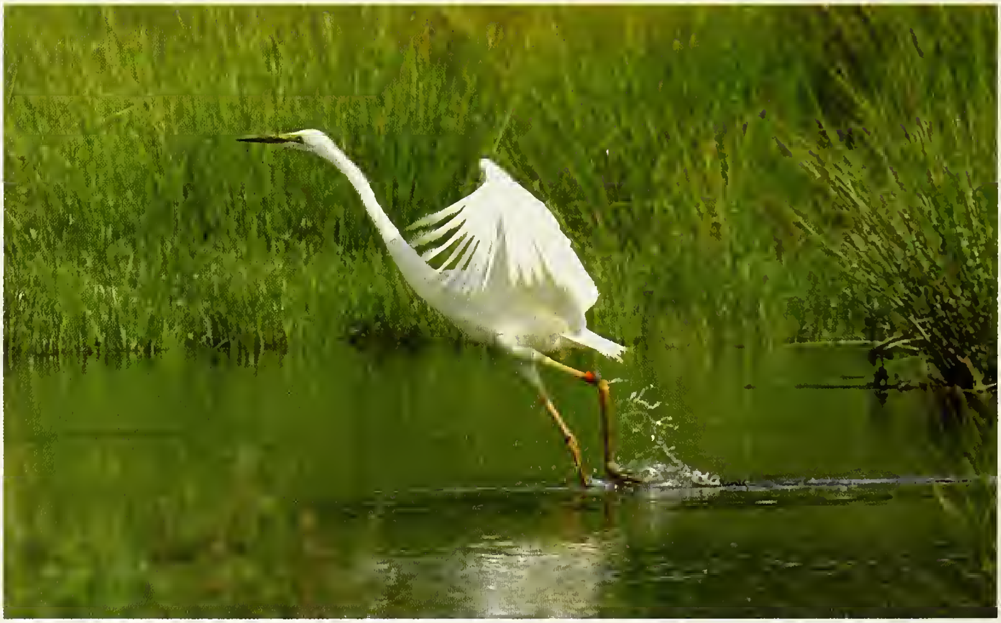
Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* Cley (Norfolk), 29th May; Southport (Merseyside), 4th June. **American Golden Plover** *Pluvialis dominica* Samson (Scilly), 8th-10th June. **Temminck's Stint** *Calidris temminckii* A huge influx, of at least 150, occurred during May, including groups of seven at Druridge Pools (Northumberland), six at Wicken Fen (Cambridgeshire), and four at both Dungeness and Hickling Broad. **Baird's Sandpiper** *Calidris bairdii*



Jim Lawrence

218. Male Cinnamon Teal *Anas cyanoptera*, Lewis, Western Isles, May 2004. Another headache for those saddled with judging the provenance of rare wildfowl, though unquestionably a smart bird to see in a beautiful part of the country.

Rye Harbour (East Sussex), 17th-18th May. **Broad-billed Sandpiper** *Limicola falcinellus* Hickling Broad, 14th May; Drayton Bassett Gravelpits, 7th-10th June. **Spotted Sandpiper** *Actitis macularius* Tresco (Scilly), 31st May to 1st June. **Franklin's Gull** *Larus pipixcan* Foula (Shetland), 10th June. **Bonaparte's Gull** *Larus philadelphia* Inner Marsh Farm (Cheshire), 20th May; Handa (Highland), 20th May; Scourie (Highland), 22nd-23rd May; Bowling Green Marsh



Mike Malpass

219. Great White Egret *Ardea alba*, Leighton Moss, Lancashire, May 2004.

220. Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*, Farmoor Reservoir, Oxfordshire, May 2004, part of a widespread influx into Britain during May 2004.

(Devon), 9th-10th June. **Gull-billed Tern** *Sterna nilotica* Covenham Reservoir (Lincolnshire), 16th May. **Whiskered Tern** *Chlidonias hybrida* Potterick Carr (South Yorkshire), four, 16th May. **White-winged Black Tern** *Chlidonias leucopterus* Hickling Broad, two, 18th-27th May; New Swillington Ings (West Yorkshire), two, 21st May; Cliffe Pools (Kent), 24th-28th May.

Eurasian Scops Owl *Otus scops* Forties Delta oil platform, 160 km east of Aberdeen, 2nd June, taken into care. **Alpine Swift** *Apus melba* Birken-

221. Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*, Drayton Bassett Gravel-pits, Staffordshire, June 2004

Gerry O'Neill

222. Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca*, Quoile Pondage, Co. Down, June 2004.

Deryk Shaw

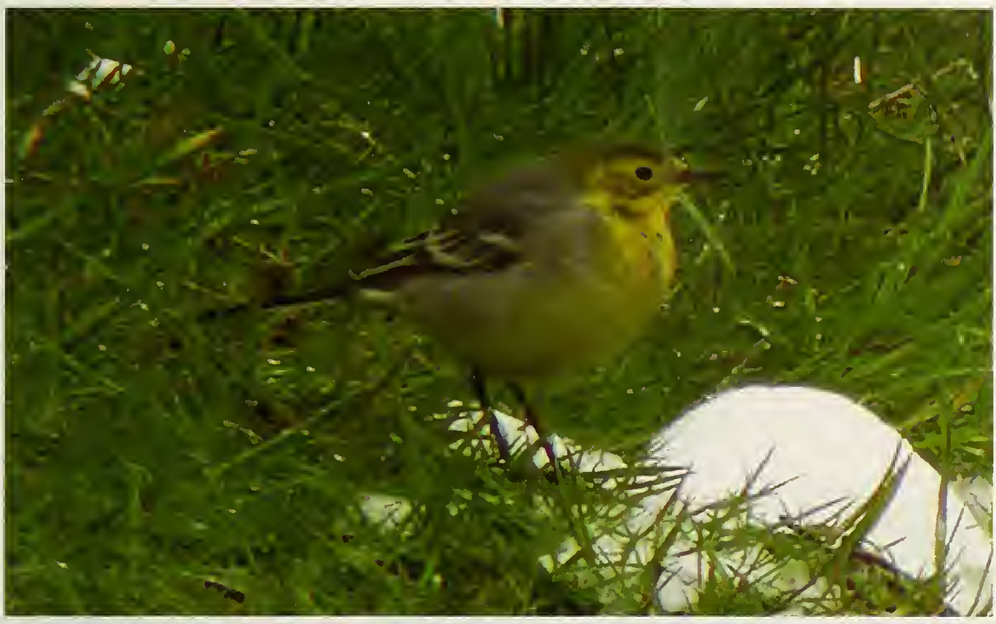
223. Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*, Fair Isle, Shetland, May 2004.

head (Cheshire), 27th May; Alvaston (Derbyshire), 7th June. **Little Swift** *Apus affinis* Porthcothan (Cornwall), 3rd June. **European Bee-eater** *Merops apiaster* Ely (Cambridgeshire), 12th May; Sandwich Bay, five, 16th May; three, seen at various localities along the north Norfolk coast, from Cley to Kings Lynn, 16th May; Bryher, then Tresco (Scilly), three, 16th May; St Margaret's-at-Cliffe (Kent), 18th May; Sennen (Cornwall), 19th May; Southwold (Suffolk), 19th May; Stonar Lake (Kent), two, 22nd May; Lodmoor (Dorset), 25th May; Oare Marshes (Kent), 26th May; Spurn (East Yorkshire), 31st May and 8th June; Westray (Orkney), 31st May; Lerwick (Shetland), 31st May; Seasalter (Kent), ten, 6th June; Margate, 7th June.

Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla* Tresco, 12th-13th May; Spurn, 15th May; Ardnamurchan (Highland), 16th May; Tyninghame Bay (Lothian), 16th May; Bryher, 23rd-25th May; Foula, 3rd and 10th June. **Red-rumped Swallow** *Hirundo daurica* In addition to those mentioned last month, Capel-Le-Ferne (Kent), two, 12th May; Grove Ferry (Kent), 12th May; Abbot's Cliff (Kent), two, 13th May; Bempton (East Yorkshire), 15th May; Scarlett Point (Isle of Man), 15th May; Sumburgh Head (Shetland), 15th May; Holm (Orkney), 26th May; Dungeness, 31st May.

Richard's Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae* Gibraltar Point, 18th-19th May. **Tawny Pipit** *Anthus campestris* St Agnes (Scilly), 1st June. **Red-throated Pipit** *Anthus cervinus* Fair Isle (Shetland), 31st May; Spurn, 1st-2nd June. **Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola* Lizard (Cornwall), 16th May; late news of one at Salthouse (Norfolk), 24th April.

Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis* Erme Valley, Harford (Devon), 25th May. **Great Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* Dawlish Warren (Devon), 18th May; Abberton Reservoir, 18th-31st May; North Ronaldsay (Orkney), 31st May; Slapton Ley (Devon), 4th June. **Subalpine Warbler** *Sylvia cantillans* Calf of Man (Isle of Man), 16th May; Holy Island (Northumberland), 17th May; Bressay (Shet-

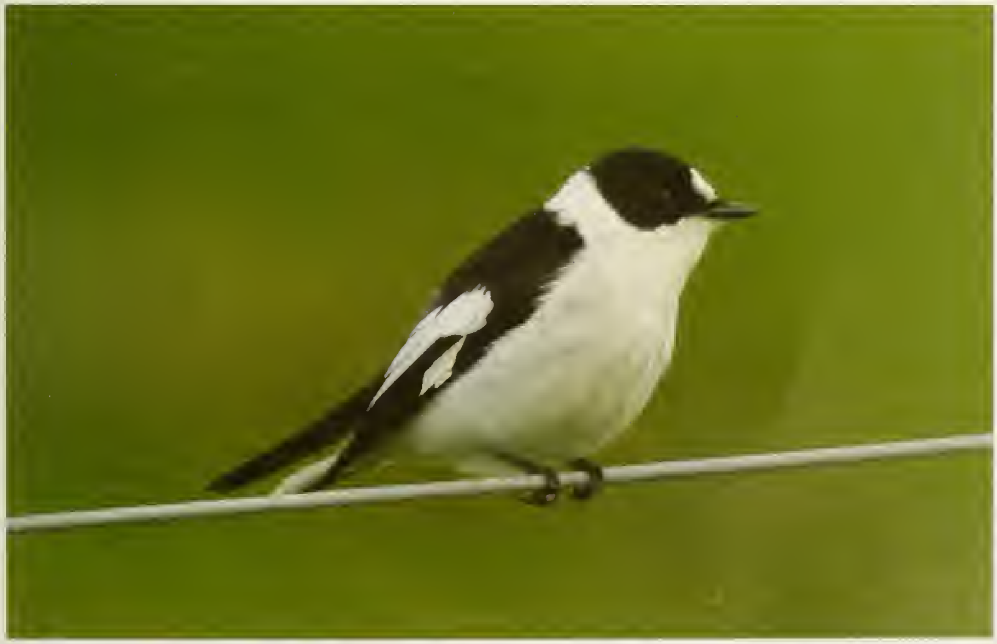


Jim Lawrence

224. Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*, Bawdsey, Suffolk, May 2004.

land), 23rd May; Fair Isle, 23rd-24th May. **Sardinian Warbler** *Sylvia melanocephala* Whalsay (Shetland), 1st-8th June at least. **Greenish Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochiloides* Portland, 10th June; Mousa (Shetland), 10th June. **Dusky Warbler** *Phylloscopus fuscatus* Fowey (Cornwall), 5th-7th June. **Iberian Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus ibericus* Kilnsea (East Yorkshire), 17th May.

Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva* Blakeney Point (Norfolk), 17th May; Fair Isle, 7th June. **Collared Flycatcher** *Ficedula albicollis* Unst (Shetland), 2nd June.



Hugh Harrop

225. Male Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis*, Unst, Shetland, June 2004.

Mike Ashforth

226. Male Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*, Hunmanby, North Yorkshire, June 2004.

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* Widespread influx, with maximum counts of twelve on Unst on 7th June, five on Fetlar (Shetland) on 2nd June, ten on Fair Isle on 2nd June, and three or four during the period on Scilly. **Woodchat Shrike** *Lanius senator* St Mary's (Scilly), 19th-22nd May; Portland, 25th May; Minnis Bay, 5th June; Papa Westray (Orkney), 5th June; Sennen, 7th-9th June. **Rose-coloured Starling** *Sturnus roseus* Freiston (Lincolnshire), 21st-23rd May; Fair Isle, 27th May to 10th June; St Agnes, long-stayer to at least 30th May; Whiteford Burrow (Glamorgan), 6th June.

Arctic Redpoll *Carduelis hornemanni* Barra (Western Isles), 7th June. **Common Rosefinch** *Carpodacus erythrinus* The following were reported away from the Northern Isles: Holkham (Norfolk), 24th May; Portland, 1st-2nd June; Spurn, 3rd-6th June; Hunmanby (North Yorkshire), 3rd-8th June; Flamborough Head (East Yorkshire), 8th-10th June; Happisburgh (Norfolk), 8th June.

White-throated Sparrow *Zonotrichia albicollis* Hull (East Yorkshire), 31st May. **Rustic Bunting** *Emberiza rustica* Bryher, 12th-13th May; Fair Isle, 4th-5th June. **Little Bunting** *Emberiza pusilla* Calf of Man, 13th May, with two on 14th May. **Red-headed Bunting** *Emberiza bruniceps* Monreith (Dumfries & Galloway), 8th-9th June. **Black-headed Bunting** *Emberiza melanocephala* Nuneaton (Warwickshire), 31st May.

Rebecca Nason

227. Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica*, Fair Isle, Shetland, June 2004.

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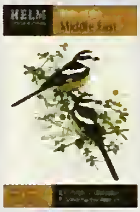

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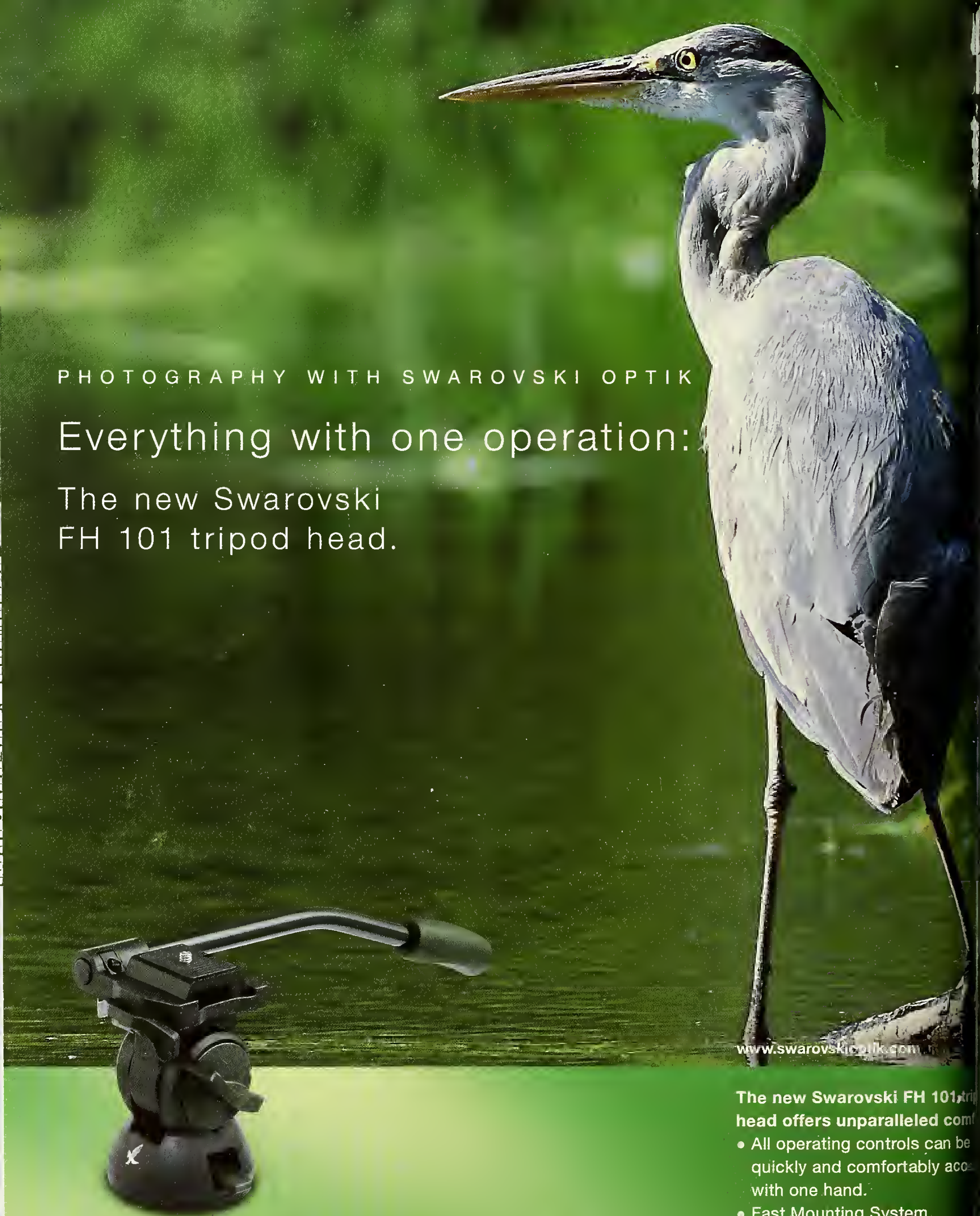

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The status of the Cirl Bunting in Britain and the Channel Islands in 2003

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Simon Wotton, Kevin Rylands, Phil Grice, Dave Smallshire and Richard Gregory

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ABSTRACT A full survey of the breeding Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus* population in Britain and the Channel Islands was undertaken in 2003. An estimated 697 territories were recorded in 118 tetrads, all in Devon. This represents an increase of 54% since the last full survey, in 1998, when 453 territories were recorded in 103 tetrads. No Cirl Buntings were found breeding elsewhere, despite searches in Cornwall and on Jersey. Although there has been some range expansion, much of the increase in the past five years has occurred within core population areas.

The Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus* is a scarce and localised breeding bird in the UK, now being confined almost entirely to south Devon. It is on the Red List of *Birds of Conservation Concern* in the UK owing to the rapid decline (>50%) in the UK breeding range over the past 25 years (Gregory *et al.* 2002), and has been identified as a priority species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (Anon. 1998). Cirl Buntings were formerly widespread across much of southern England, with the species' geographical range probably being most extensive between the end of the nineteenth century and the 1930s (Evans 1997). Its approximate range in the mid 1930s is shown in fig. 1, from Witherby *et al.* (1938). The population declined slowly from the 1930s onwards and collapsed in the mid 1970s, owing primarily to the intensification of farming practices (Evans 1996). By the 1980s, the species had disappeared from much of its former range. A national survey in 1982 found just 167 territories in only six counties (Sitters 1985), and by 1989 only 118 territories were found, all but four in Devon (Evans 1992).

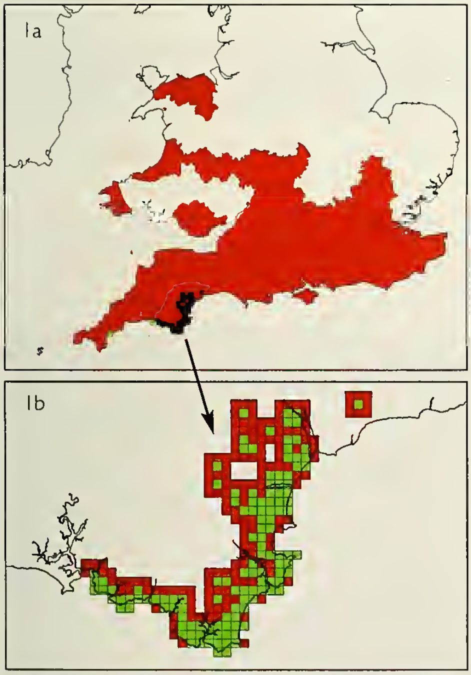

Fig. 1. Fig. 1a shows the extent of the Cirl Bunting's *Emberiza cirlus* distribution by the mid 1930s (from Witherby et *al.* 1938), highlighting the extent of coverage in Devon in 2003 (black) and the two areas that were searched in Cornwall in 2003 (green dots). The distribution of the core (green, n=127) and buffer (red, n=154) tetrads surveyed in Devon in 2003 is highlighted in more detail in 1b.

The last full survey of British Cirl Buntings, in 1998, found an estimated 453 territories in Devon (Wotton *et al.* 2000; table 1). Nine territories were found on Jersey in 1998 (Wotton *et al.* 2000), although no breeding pairs were recorded there in 2002 (Cath Jeffs pers. comm.). There were no records elsewhere during the 1998 survey, although reports were received of up to six birds at a site in Cornwall later in the same year (Jeffs & Lock in prep.). A sample survey had been planned for 2001 but was delayed for a year by the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. Consequently, 133 tetrads were surveyed in 2002 and the Devon population was estimated to be 576 territories (457-717, 95% confidence limits) (Wotton 2002).

Much of the increase since 1989 can be explained by the provision of suitable habitat. Winter stubbles are known to be important for Cirl Buntings (Evans & Smith 1994), and stubbles were restored to the countryside through set-aside (Evans 1997) and later through the Countryside Stewardship Scheme (Peach *et al.* 2001). The latter also provided unimproved pasture and grass margins, both of which are important breeding habitats (Evans *et al.* 1997; Peach *et al.* 2001; Stevens *et al.* 2002). A joint RSPB/English Nature Cirl Bunting recovery project has promoted appropriate management programmes, and the Countryside Stewardship Scheme as a whole, to key areas since 1995 (details available at http://www.rspb.org.uk/england/southwest/conservation/cirlbuntings/index.asp).

The objectives of the 2003 survey were threefold: a) to conduct a full survey of the known range in Devon; b) to survey areas bordering the known range to assess potential range expansion; and c) to cover sites in Cornwall and Jersey with recent records of Cirl Buntings.

Methods

Survey area

The survey was conducted primarily in Devon and was based on the species' known range. The survey area was derived from the occupied tetrads (2 km x 2 km squares) found in 1998, in addition to those tetrads known to have been occupied in subsequent years. In the 1998 survey, 103 occupied tetrads were recorded. Two new occupied tetrads were located during the 1999 Countryside Stewardship monitoring project (Peach *et al.* 2001), with a further 22

Chris Gomersall/RSPB Images

228. Male Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*, Devon.

found during the sample survey in 2002 (Wotton 2002), thus giving 127 'core' tetrads. In an attempt to identify potential range expansion, areas around the core tetrads were also surveyed. This 'buffer' range was defined as tetrads adjacent to those in the core range, a total of 154 tetrads in all (excluding those which were in the sea). The distribution of the core and buffer tetrads is shown in fig. 1.

Fieldwork was also carried out on the Rame and Roseland peninsulas in Cornwall where there have been recent Cirl Bunting sightings (Cath Jeffs pers. comm.); eight tetrads were surveyed in total. In addition, searches were carried out on Jersey, based on last known sightings.

Cath Jeffs/RSPB

229. This area of prime farmland habitat for Cirl Buntings *Emberiza cirlus*, between Teignmouth and Bishopsteignton, contained possibly the highest territory density in Devon during the 2003 survey.

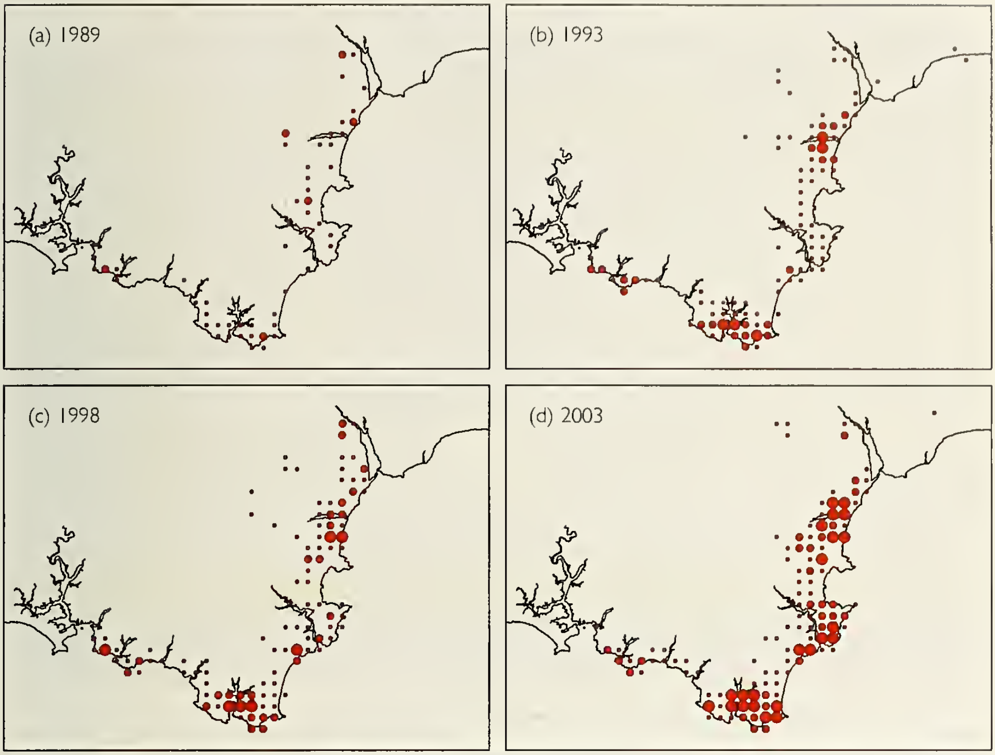

Fig. 2. The Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus* tetrad distribution, in (a) 1989, (b) 1993, (c) 1998, and (d) 2003. The symbols signify 1-4, 5-9 and 10-21 territories, from smallest to largest. Data from Evans 1992, Evans 1994, Wotton *et al.* 2000 and this survey.

Survey methods

The survey methods have been used for censusing Cirl Buntings since 1989 (Wotton *et al.* 2000). Each tetrad was visited twice during the breeding season. The first visit was made between mid April and the end of May, the second between the beginning of June and the end of August, with a minimum of two weeks between each visit. A sample number of core and buffer tetrads were visited four times (see below). The tetrads were surveyed by walking all public rights-of-way (including all roads and footpaths) and areas of public open space. Cirl Bunting song is audible for up to 500 m in good conditions (Gilbert *et al.* 1998), so most areas of each tetrad would be covered using this method. Permission to enter private land was sought where necessary. The tetrad coverage was directly comparable with every Cirl Bunting survey in southern Britain since 1989.

The locations of any Cirl Buntings seen or heard were recorded on a 1:10,000 map of the tetrad using standard BTO mapping symbols (Bibby *et al.* 1992) to denote their behaviour and breeding status. The estimated *minimum* number of territories comprised the 'probable' and 'confirmed' territories in the tetrad, based on the behaviour observed during fieldwork (Gibbons *et al.* 1993). The *maximum* estimate also included 'possible' breeding birds – birds seen in the tetrad but which showed no sign of territorial behaviour.

Using survey results to produce a population estimate

Studies have shown that there is an asymptotic relationship between search effort and the number of Cirl Bunting territories located, which in practice means that virtually all territories (c. 99%) are located by the fourth visit to any tetrad (Evans 1992). Consequently, a sample of 25 core and 16 buffer tetrads were visited four times, in order to derive a correction factor which allowed us to estimate the number of territories missed in those tetrads which were visited only twice. Of this sample, 23 core tetrads were occupied but only one buffer tetrad contained Cirl Buntings.

Of the 24 occupied tetrads that were visited four times, the proportion of territories found

Table 1. The maximum number of Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus* territories recorded in full surveys in Devon between 1989 and 2003, showing the range change between surveys. Data from Evans 1992, Evans 1994, Wotton *et al.* 2000 and this survey.

Year	Tetrads surveyed	Occupied tetrads	Estimated total no. territories (±95% confidence limits)	% change between each survey	Tetrads with ten or more territories	Tetrads occupied in only one year
1989	104	50	114 (104-127)	-	0	1
1993	127	95	352[1]	+209%	5	10
1998	263	103	453 (415-504)	+29%	7	10
2003	281	118	697 (645-770)	+54%	23	25

[1] In 1993, search effort was so high that it was assumed that all birds were located in all tetrads (Evans 1994).

after the first two visits was calculated for each tetrad, and the mean proportion for all 24 tetrads calculated. We used this figure to derive our estimate of the population in all tetrads visited. The number of territories found in two-visit tetrads was thus divided by the mean proportion to give a figure comparable with the results from four-visit tetrads. In addition, 95% confidence limits were calculated, to give realistic upper and lower limits to our estimates[1].

Results

Of the 127 core tetrads surveyed, 101 were occupied. A minimum of 544 and a maximum of 567 territories were located in these 101 core tetrads. Of the 154 buffer tetrads, 17 were occupied, and contained a minimum of 29 and maximum of 31 territories. In total, therefore, a minimum of 573 and maximum of 598 territories were located in Devon in 2003.

In the 24 occupied territories visited four times, the mean proportion of the final minimum and maximum number of territories recorded after two visits was 0.79 and 0.82 respectively. After applying this correction factor for extra visits, the population estimate for Devon in 2003 is thus 691 (630-777) to 697 (645-770) territories. No Cirl Buntings were located in Cornwall. In Jersey, there was only one casual record of a male in June, but no evidence of breeding.

In all, 118 tetrads were occupied in Devon in 2003, an increase of 15 since 1998. This increase obscures the fact that 21 of the tetrads occupied in 1998 were unoccupied in 2003, while 36 newly occupied tetrads were found in 2003 compared with 1998. Twenty-five of the tetrads occupied in 2003 were not occupied in any previous surveys, although this also applied to ten occupied tetrads in both 1993 and 1998 and one in 1989. The increase in numbers and range since 1989 is summarised in table 1.

Fig. 2 shows the Cirl Bunting distribution in Devon in 1989, 1993, 1998 and 2003. The maps show that much of the increase in 2003 is within core areas. This is also highlighted in table 1, which shows that there were 23 tetrads in 2003 which contained ten or more territories, compared with seven in 1998, five in 1993 and none in 1989.

Discussion

The results of the 2003 survey show a 54% increase in the British Cirl Bunting population since the last full survey in 1998. There was little difference between the final minimum and maximum population estimates, suggesting that more than two visits to a square is useful in terms of converting 'possible' records into 'probable' or 'confirmed' territories. As the Cirl Bunting can be a difficult species to detect, particularly at low densities, and is sedentary, it is thought likely that most of the 'possible' records do indeed refer to birds on territory. For this reason, it is considered that the maximum population estimate is the most accurate assessment of true population size. It should also be remembered that a search effort with unlimited access would also be expected to locate more territories in the few tetrads where there are limited public rights-of-way (Wotton *et al.* 2000), so the final total should be regarded as

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Footnote:

[1] Confidence limits were obtained by bootstrapping (Greenwood 1991) from the 24 four-visit tetrads, to obtain 999 estimates of the mean proportion of birds detected after two visits and applying the method described. The 999 proportion estimates generated by the bootstrapping procedure were sorted, and the 25th and 975th estimates taken as the lower and upper 95% confidence limits respectively.

230. Female Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*, Devon

conservative. Intensive surveying across the entire range is not efficient or practical for most large-scale surveys, however, owing to the effort and resources required. In addition, Cirl Bunting survey methods have been standardised since 1989 to allow population trends to be monitored accurately.

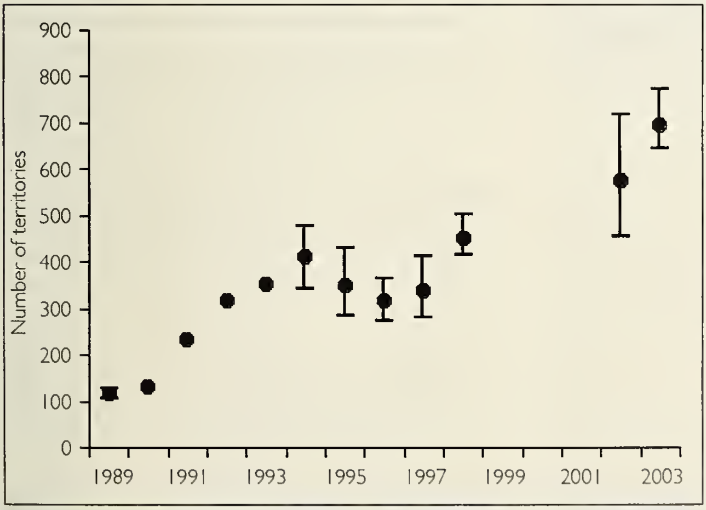

Fig. 3. The estimated total number of Cirl Buntings *Emberiza cirlus* in Devon between 1989 and 2003. The totals for 1990, 1991 and 1992 were the actual totals recorded and have not been corrected for extra search effort, as the information on number of visits made to each tetrad was frequently not available. In 1993, search effort was so high that it was assumed that all birds were located in all tetrads (Evans 1994). The population was not monitored between 1999 and 2001. Data from Evans 1992, Evans 1994, Wotton *et al.* 2000 and this survey.

The accuracy of the 2003 survey is highlighted in fig. 3 by the narrow confidence limits. The percentage error of the confidence limits for the 2003 survey was 9%, compared with 23% for the 2002 sample survey and 10% for the 1998 full survey. This demonstrates the value of carrying out full Cirl Bunting surveys at regular intervals, compared with more frequent sample surveys.

The population estimate for 2003 exceeds the UK Biodiversity Action Plan target to increase the UK population to 550 territories by 2003 (Anon. 1998). There has been only a 15% increase in the number of occupied tetrads since 1998, however, suggesting a con-

Cath Jeffs/RSPB

231. This low-input barley stubble field, on land under a long-standing Countryside Stewardship agreement, meets all the winter foraging requirements of Cirl Buntings *Emberiza cirlus*. The adjacent hedge is also ideal nesting habitat.

tinuing consolidation within the known range. Since 1989, there has been a population increase of more than 500% and a 136% increase in the number of occupied tetrads, highlighted in table 1 and fig. 2. The slow rate of recent range expansion, compared with the population increase, is highlighted in fig. 4, which shows that there was a noticeable increase in range between 1989 and 1993, but that this has since levelled off.

Our results show that numbers are increasing in several of the known core areas in Devon, especially around the Salcombe estuary (south of Kingsbridge), the area between Paignton, Brixham and Kingswear, and from Bishopsteignton south to Torbay (fig. 2d). A similar trend was apparent after the 1998 survey, when it was found that much of the population increase since 1993 came from consolidation within tetrads that were already occupied (Wotton *et al.* 2000). These increases are in areas containing a number of Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) agreements. It is likely that the benefits of the CSS agreements, as shown by Peach *et al.* 2001, have had a further positive effect on Cirl Bunting numbers. Extra fieldwork

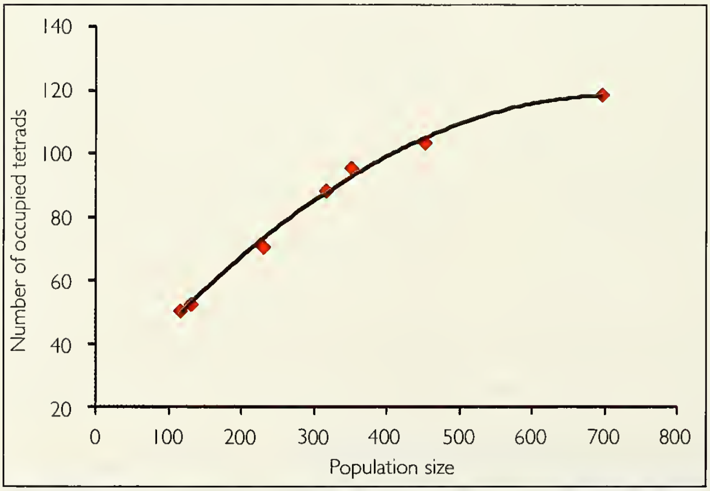

Fig. 4. The relationship between Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus* abundance and occupied range, from 1989 to 2003. The points refer to all the full surveys from 1989, from left to right: 1989-1993, 1998 and 2003. A polynomial trend line (y = -0.0002x2 + 0.3x + 19.2) has been fitted to the graph. Data from Evans 1992, Evans 1994, Wotton *et al.* 2000 and this survey.

was undertaken in 2003 to study the relationship between Cirl Bunting territories and CSS agreements, and the analysis of these data is ongoing.

The UK Biodiversity Action Plan also includes targets to reduce fragmentation and increase the range of the Cirl Bunting population. The 2003 survey has shown that there has been some range expansion along the River Dart and south of Newton Abbot since 1989 (fig. 2). Nonetheless, there are also signs that there have been declines in some areas, primarily in the far west and northeast of the range. Other factors, related to changes in farming practice and the loss of habitat owing to development, may also have an impact on the population as it continues to increase. Building developments have the potential to cause serious local impacts. For example, in the Teignbridge and Torbay areas, up to 25% of the national Cirl Bunting population is potentially threatened either directly or indirectly by (primarily housing) development proposals (Cath Jeffs pers. comm.). The Countryside Stewardship Scheme in England will be incorporated into the new Environmental Stewardship Scheme in 2005 (details are available at http://www.defra.gov.uk/). While the main land management prescriptions for Cirl Buntings will be part of the new scheme, continued population monitoring will be vital to ensure that there are no unforeseen, adverse impacts on the population of this attractive and charismatic bunting.

Acknowledgments

The survey was organised and funded by RSPB, English Nature and the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). Thanks go to all the volunteers who undertook fieldwork in 2003. Andy Evans, Cath Jeffs, Tony Paintin and Nik Ward provided additional advice and comments.

Cath Jeffs/RSPB

232. Typical dense, bushy 'Devon' hedges provide ideal nesting habitat for the majority of the Cirl Buntings *Emberiza cirlus* in Devon. The hedges shown here are in an area of high Cirl Bunting density.

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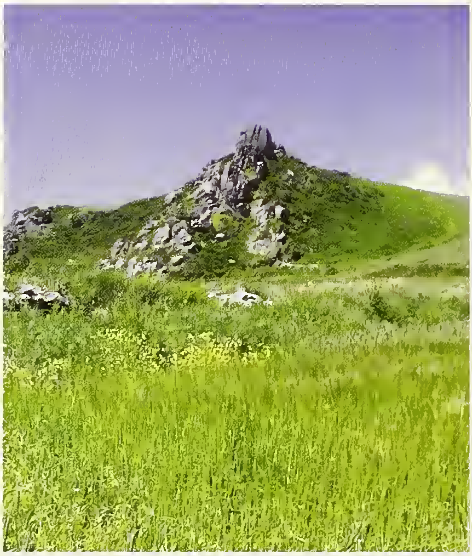

233. A low-input spring barley crop with a weedy grass margin can provide abundant food for both adult and young Cirl Buntings *Emberiza cirlus* during the summer. Here, suitable nest-sites are provided by the dense patches of scrub surrounding the rocky outcrops of Prawle Point on the south Devon coast.

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Looking back

Seventy-five years ago:

'CIRL BUNTING IN CUMBERLAND. On June 8th, 1929, I saw a male Cirl Bunting (*Emberiza cirlus*) near Penrith, and two days later saw the female.

'Though I could not find the nest, it was obvious from the distress of the birds that they were nesting. Although I can find no previous record of the bird for Cumberland, I have suspected its presence from two separate reports that reached me last year from the place where I saw the birds this year. H. J. Moon.' (*Brit. Birds* 23: 60, August 1929)

'THE SOARING OF THE CHOUGH. On May 21st, 1929, from 11.30 a.m. to 6 p.m., I observed at close quarters a pair of Choughs (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*) at a nest on the north Cornish coast. Both parents were feeding nestlings, which were about eight days old. The weather was calm and soft with a cloudless sky.

'The Choughs were always in company and approached the nest, built within a cavity, not from the top of the cliff but from well below the nest, which they entered with a rapid and almost perpendicular upward swoop for the last few feet. Visits were paid to the young on average every thirty minutes. After the young had been fed, the hen brooded them for about five minutes, while the cock emerged and waited for his mate to quit and then accompanied her on the next search for food. Although it is impossible to be sure that both the parents actually fed the young, it was clear that both brought food on each visit.

'On one occasion only (about 3 p.m.) the Choughs, on leaving the nest, soared to a great altitude, rising in circles in the manner of Buzzards (*Buteo buteo*), and flew far out over the open ocean until they were invisible through the glasses. This was considerably their longest absence, amounting to close on one hour. Subsequently, food continued to be brought from the cliff slopes and fields above, the range appearing to be at least one mile either up or down the coast. B. H. Ryves.' (*Brit. Birds* 23: 59, August 1929)

Bird Photograph of the Year 2004

The judging of this competition is always something to look forward to, even though the process of determining the winner is not always easy, and this year was no exception. The number of entries and photographers involved in the 2004 award was comparable with those of previous years, and the judging panel was the same as in 2003 (see *Brit. Birds* 96: 318-326). The selection process followed the usual routine, whereby the original field was reduced to a final shortlist, with the help of several viewings and an intermediate shortlist.

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This year, the first in which we have incorporated work from photographers who have switched to digital cameras, we also had to compare digital images with traditional slides. We were slightly apprehensive as to how well this would work, but it proved not to be a significant problem. Just six photographers submitted digital images this year, but we presume that this figure will increase steadily over the coming years as the digital revolution gathers momentum. Of those in the final shortlist, Steve Young, Tony Ellis and Michael Gore were using digital cameras, and congratulations are due to Steve Young, in fifth place overall, for being the digital champion this year.

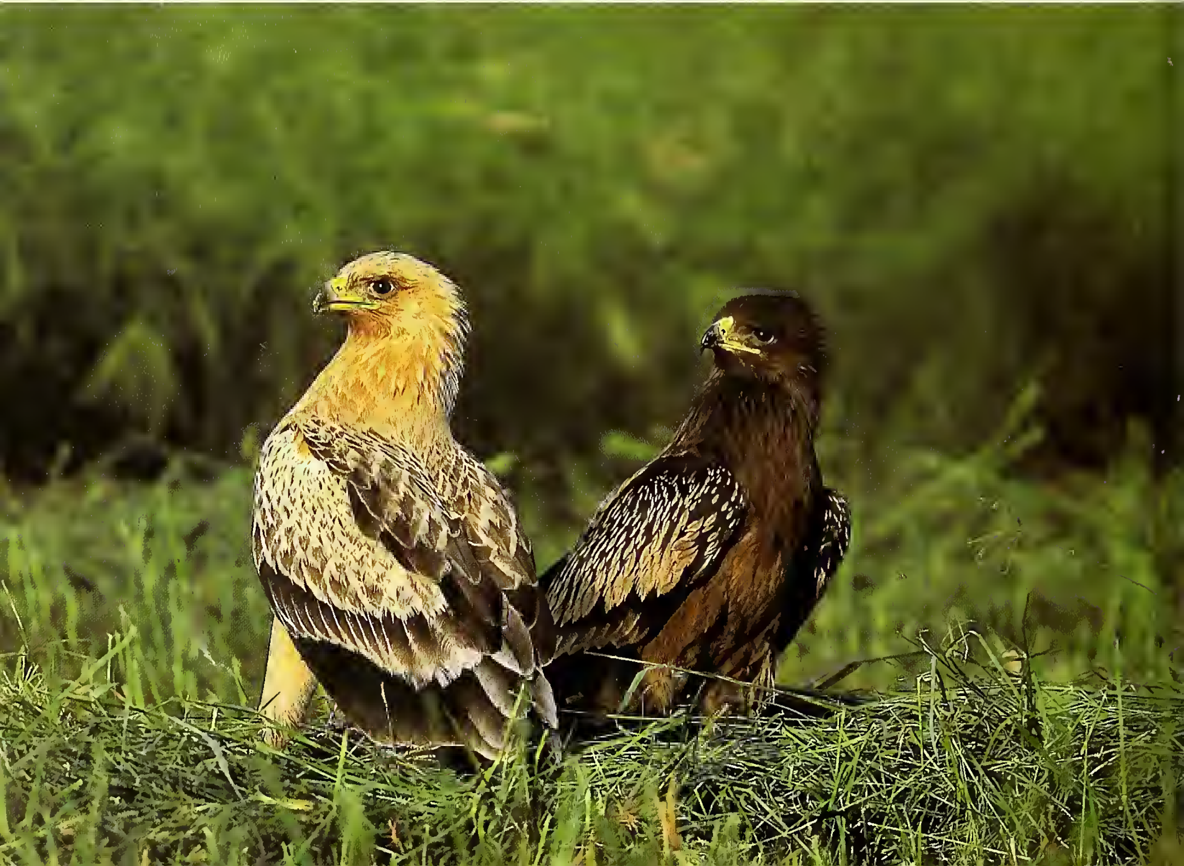
The overall aims of the competition remain the same, irrespective of the format used, which is to produce the best and/or the most scientifically interesting photograph of a Western Palearctic species. Shots which illustrate interesting behaviour, those which clearly required a skilful approach on behalf of the photographer, or which are in other ways unusual or new to the judging panel, will always score highly, and the winners this year reflect that bias. The 2004 final shortlist numbered 21 images, the details of which are given in the table overleaf.

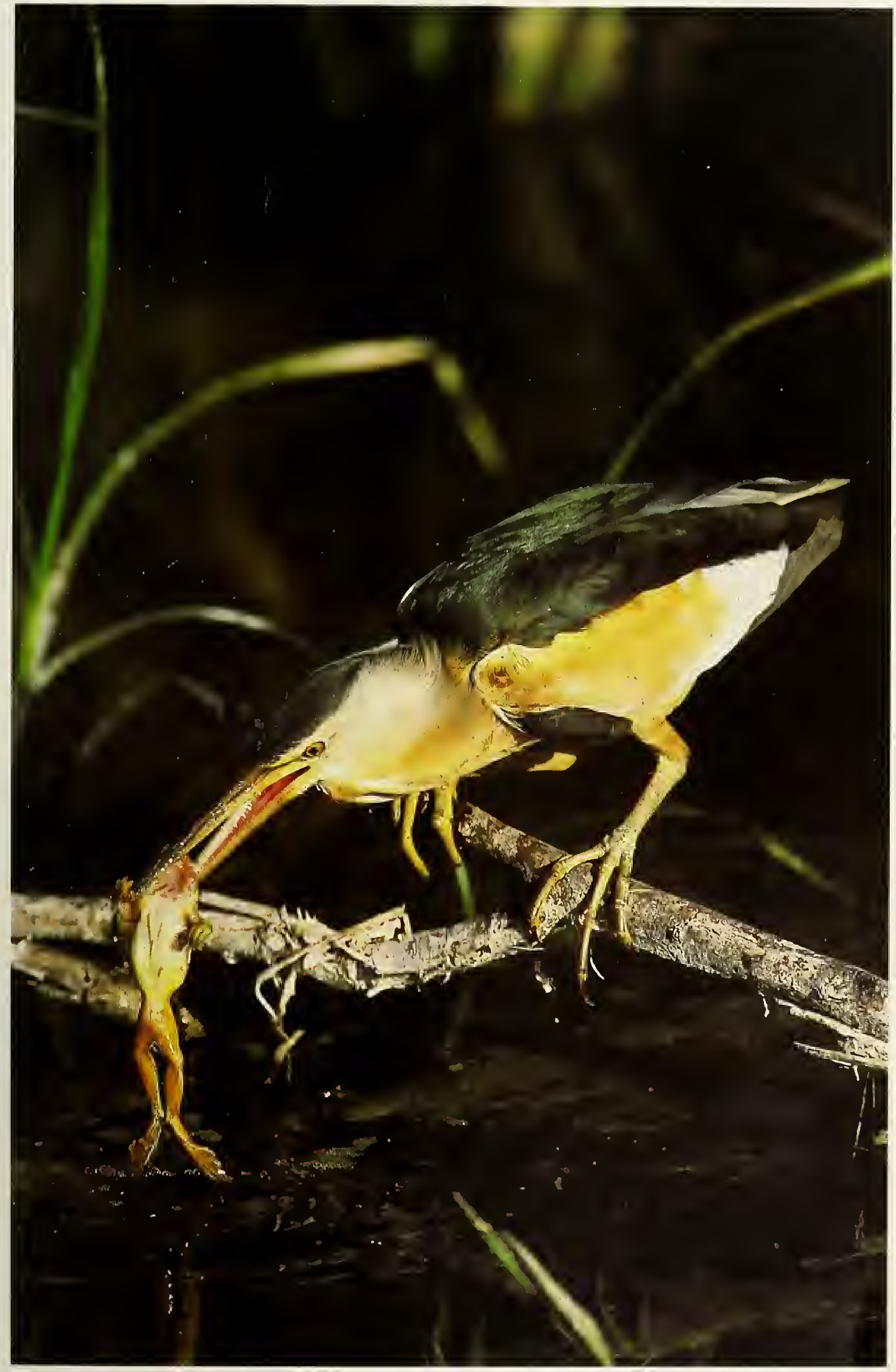
Jens Eriksen's winning photograph was taken in Oman and shows two juvenile Spotted Eagles *Aquila clanga*, a pale morph and a dark morph, together on the ground (plate 234). Jens says that 'Spotted Eagles are common winter visitors in our area, despite being vulnerable on a global scale. A few birds are of the pale, so-called '*fulvescens*'-type, which seems to be more frequent in the eastern part of the species' range. Many years ago I was about to press the shutter for a photograph of a pale-morph juvenile together with a typical juvenile, but a fraction of a second before getting the photo the pale bird flew off. This image has thus been in

continued on page 390

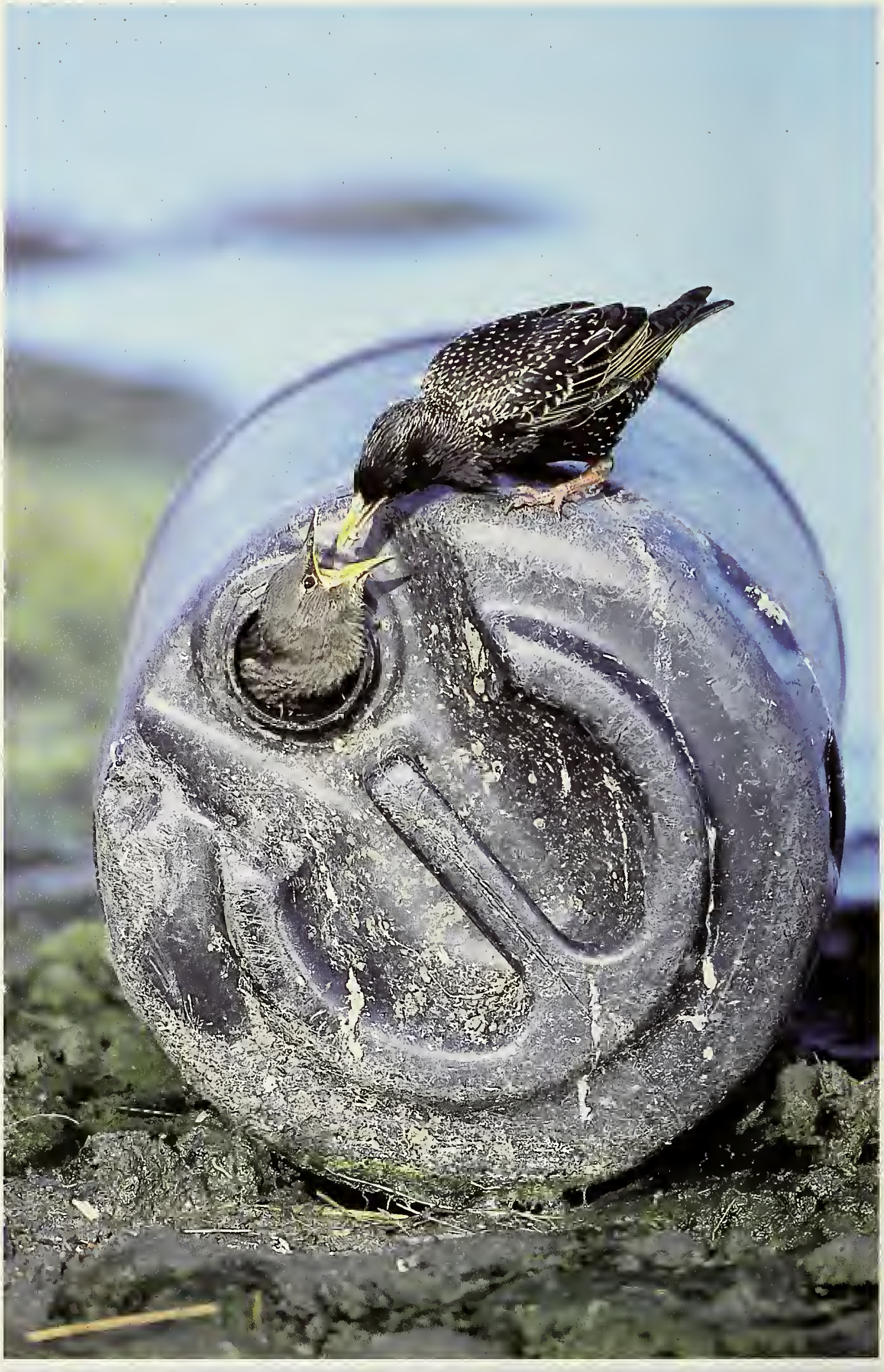
1st	Spotted Eagles *Aquila clanga*	(plate 234)	Jens Eriksen (Oman)
2nd	Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*	(plate 235)	Bill Baston (Suffolk)
3rd	Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris*	(plate 236)	Tim Loseby (Kent)
4th	Peregrine Falcons *Falco peregrinus*	(plate 237)	Edmund Fellowes (Dumfries & Galloway)
5th	Common Swift *Apus apus*	(plate 238)	Steve Young (Merseyside)
6th	Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris*	(plate 239)	Alan Petty (Kent)
7th	Pygmy Owl *Glaucidium passerinum*	(plate 240)	Larry Dalziel (Shetland)
8th	Great Crested Grebes *Podiceps cristatus*	(plate 241)	A. P. Ellis (West Midlands)
9th	Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*	(plate 242)	Hanne Eriksen (Oman)
10th	Gull-billed Tern *Sterna nilotica*	(plate 243)	Roger Tidman (Norfolk)
11th	Tree Sparrows *Passer montanus*	(plate 244)	Mike Wilkes (Worcestershire)
12th	Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga* and Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*	(plate 245)	Jens Eriksen
13th=	Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*		Richard Brooks (Norfolk)
13th=	Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus*		Michael Gore (Surrey)
15th	Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*		Alan Petty
16th	Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*		Mike Lane (West Midlands)
17th	Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala*		Reston Kilgour (Essex)
18th	Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*		Hanne Eriksen
19th	Rooks *Corvus frugilegus*		Mike Wilkes
20th	Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*		Ray Tipper (Portugal)
21st	Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*		Chris Knights (Norfolk)

234. BIRD PHOTOGRAPH OF THE YEAR 2004. Juvenile Spotted Eagles *Aquila clanga*, Sun Farms, Sohar, Oman, November 2003 (Canon EOS 1V; Canon EF 600-mm f4 IS lens, with 1.4x converter; 1/125, f5.6, Fuji Velvia 50). *Jens Eriksen*

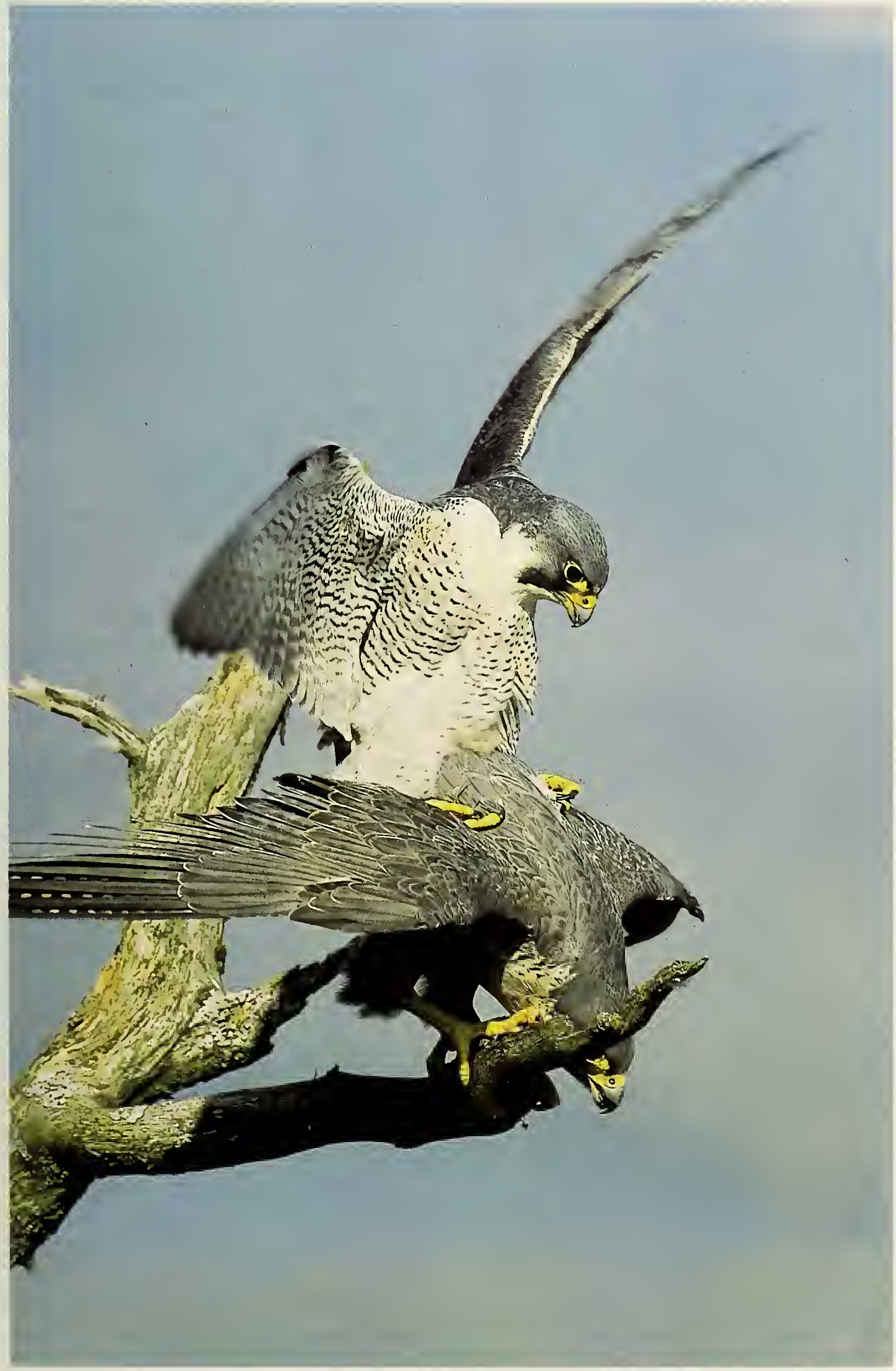




235. SECOND. Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*, Lesvos, Greece, April 2003 (Canon EOS IV; Canon 500-mm f4 IS lens, with 1.4x converter; 1/250, f7.1, Fuji Sensia 100). *Bill Baston*



236. THIRD. Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris*, Grutness, Shetland, June 2003 (Nikon F100; Nikon 500-mm f4 AFS lens; 1/250, f5.6, Fuji Provia 100). *Tim Loseby*



237. FOURTH. Peregrine Falcons *Falco peregrinus*, Dumfries & Galloway, March 2003 (Canon EOS 5; Canon 300-mm f2.8 lens, with 1.4x converter; 1/125, f4.0, Fuji Sensia 100). *Edmund Fellowes*

continued from page 385

my mind ever since, and I have waited 15 years for the same opportunity, but here it was, and with a particularly beautiful *fulvescens* at that, one of the palest I have ever seen.' Relatively few photos of the rare pale-morph exist, and here we have a direct comparison, well composed, with both birds in sharp focus. The combination of rare bird and good photo attracted the judges' attention, and after the votes were summed this proved to be the winner in a particularly tight contest this year. The prizes for our winner this year include a GORE-TEX jacket from leading outdoor clothing specialists Sprayway. This marks the third year of sponsorship for this competition by Sprayway, and this year they have donated their award-winning Commanche GTX, a lightweight jacket which should be ideal for those occasional showers in a hot country like Oman! As well as the jacket, our long-term sponsorship from the two leading natural-history book publishers in the UK, HarperCollins and A&C Black, means that our winner gets to choose from a great variety of top bird books, in addition to receiving the traditional inscribed salver.

In second place, Bill Baston's Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* with tree frog *Hyla* is a beautifully composed action shot, both bird and prey well-shown, and vertical/portrait format is used to remarkably good effect in this image (plate 235). Bill describes how he came across this Little Bittern fishing along a quiet stream during an April trip to Lesvos. 'It had just caught a tree frog, which turned out to be more than a mouthful compared with its usual diet of tadpoles. Nevertheless, the frog soon disappeared down the bird's throat, and was followed a few minutes later by a large lizard (Squamata) of some sort, which provided a second course of similar size. The bittern sat still and quiet for a while after this!'

In third place, Tim Loseby's fine portrait of a novel Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* nest-site in Shetland again provides action and interest (plate 236). Tim was at the Grutness pier, in southern Shetland, looking for an opportunity to photograph the summering Great Northern Divers in the bay, and admits

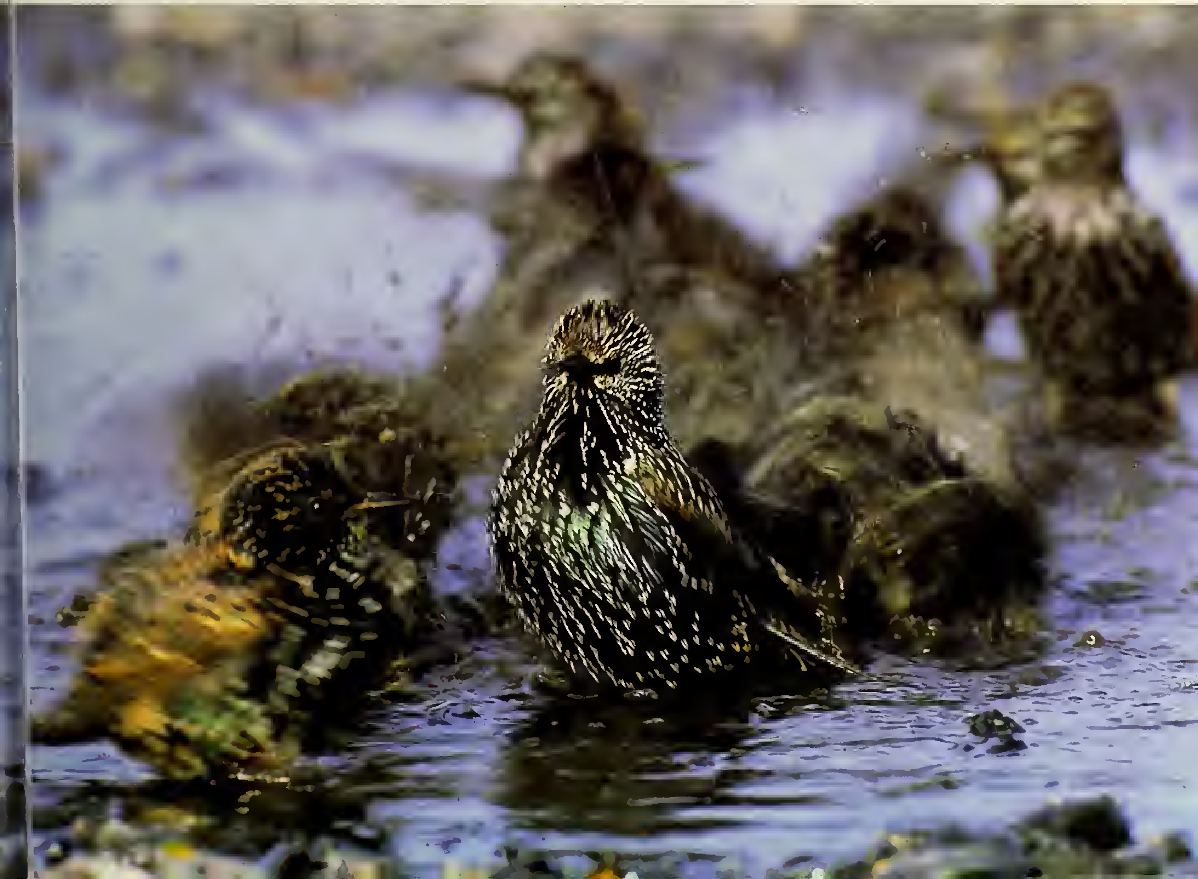
238. FIFTH. Common Swift *Apus apus*, Seaforth, Merseyside, July 2003 (Nikon D1X; Nikon 300-mm f4 AF lens; 1/1500, f8, ISO 200). *Steve Young*

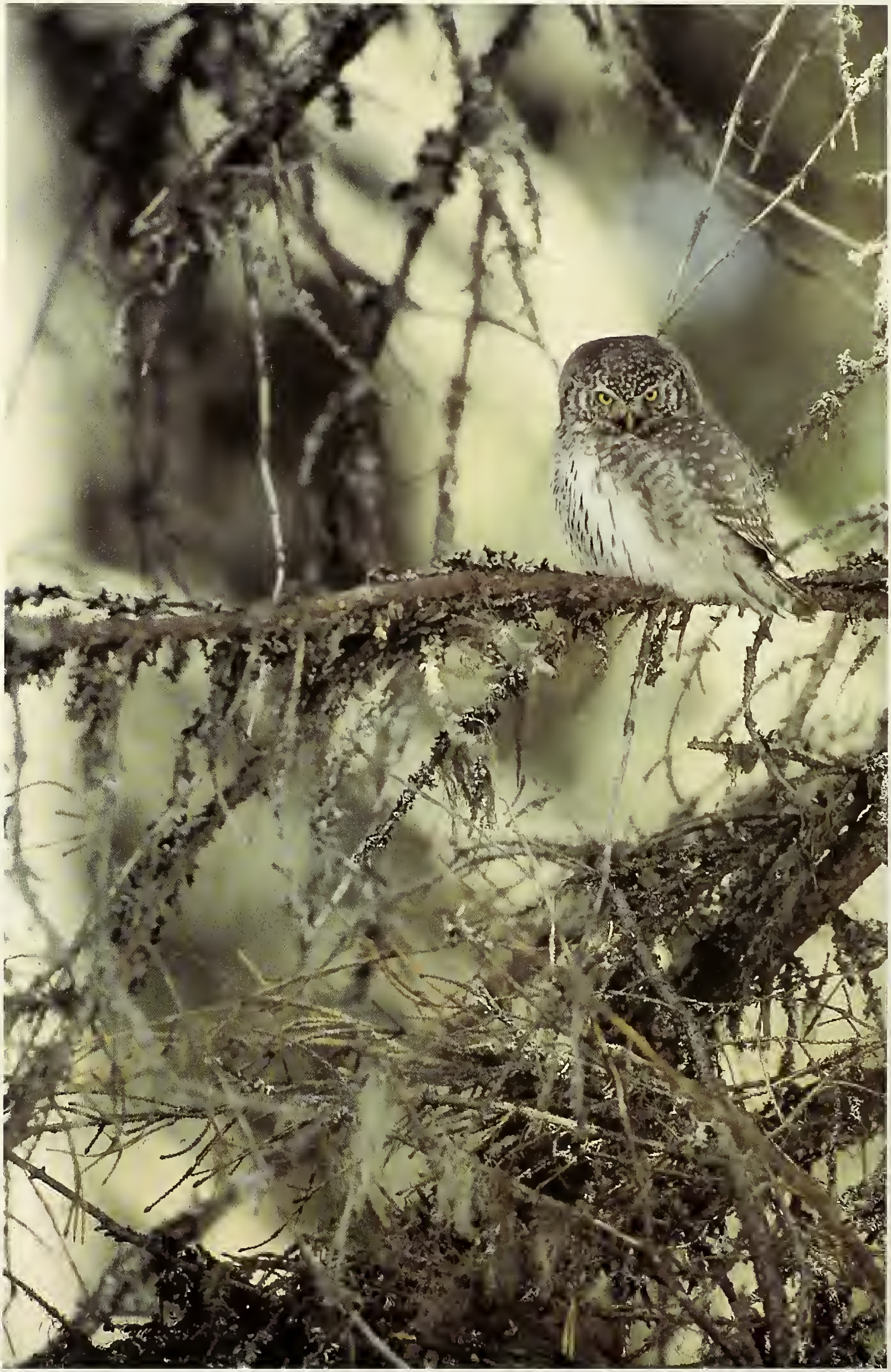
that he was cursing all the rubbish lying around, including an old plastic barrel. In mid-curse, he was amazed to see a juvenile starling's head emerge from the filler pipe and a parent come to feed it! 'The density of Common Starlings in Shetland is quite high, so some birds have to make do with suboptimal nest-sites, although perhaps this one is not so second-rate after all: warm and dry in all weathers, safe from marauding cats and able to cope with any amount of flooding! Fortunately, the pool is quite small, so it wouldn't have floated too far'. Tim also mused on the possibility of the parent coming back to a nest-site in a slightly different position after every foraging trip! The juveniles were well-grown when discovered and fledged within a couple of days. Prizes for second and third place this year include a selection of books, again chosen by the award winners, from HarperCollins and A&C Black.

In fourth place, Edmund Fellowes' stunning composition of Peregrine Falcons *Falco peregrinus* mating (plate 237) would quite probably have won had both birds been fully in the frame! Nonetheless, the judges commended the photographer's skill in the sudden switch to vertical format to catch such a short-lived event. Edmund recounts how he had seen Peregrines nesting in a fallen tree in the spring of 2002, and in January 2003 had erected a carefully hidden hide on a cliff-face, some 12 m from the perch shown in his photograph. 'In early March, I was pleased to see that the male bird was using the perch, so, on 21st March I entered the hide well before dawn, at 05.00 hrs. The bird was on the perch for up to an hour at a time as the light varied; about 13.00 hrs, and after much calling, he left. He was replaced by a female Peregrine, who suddenly tipped herself into a head-down position. I just had time to swivel the camera into vertical format, as I guessed that they would mate, which they did briefly and with much calling. A most exciting moment from only 12 m away!'

Common Swifts *Apus apus* are difficult to photograph in flight for obvious reasons... Steve Young admits that 'over the years I've tried many times to photograph Common Swifts in flight and, apart from a few "above my head" efforts, have failed. This year, at Seaforth, I had

239. SIXTH. Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris*, Cliffe, Kent, September 2003 (Nikon F100; Nikon 500-mm f4 lens, with 1.4x converter; 1/25, f22, Fuji Velvia 50, rated at 100 ASA). *Alan Petty*

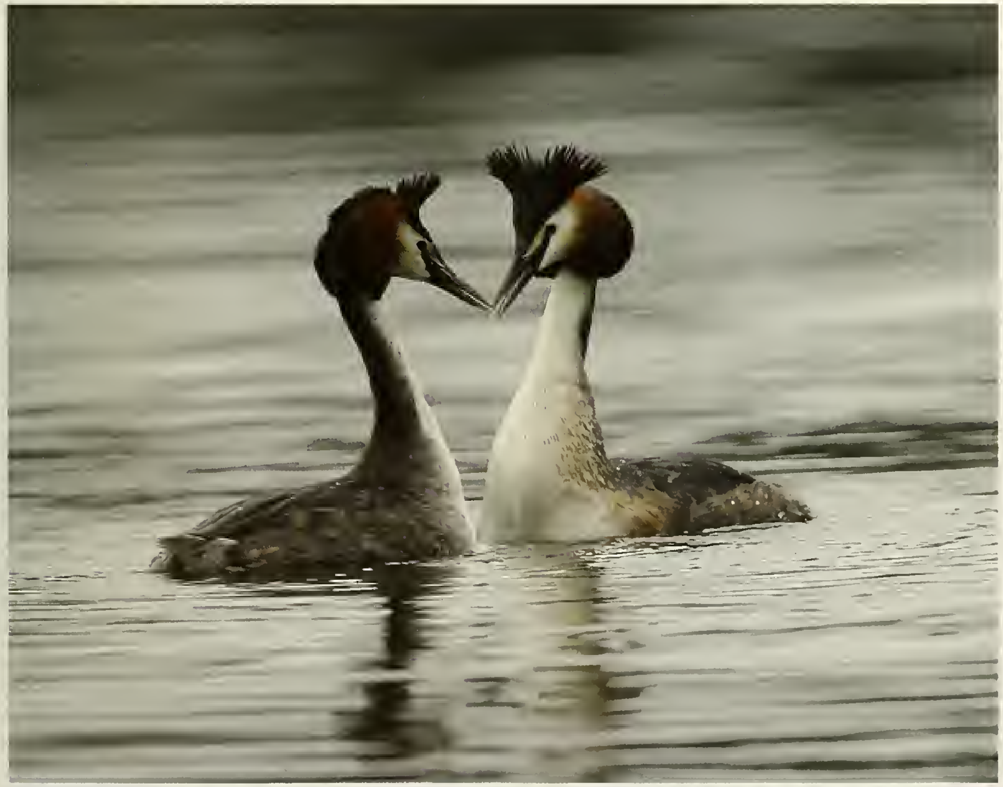




240. SEVENTH. Pygmy Owl *Glaucidium passerinum*, Oulu, Finland, April 2003 (Canon EOS 5; Canon 300-mm f2.8 lens, with 1.4x converter; Fuji Provia 100). *Larry Dalziel* noticed swifts feeding over the water on dull days, which would mean slower shutter speeds but would provide a chance to get upperwing shots. Using a 300-mm lens, I took around 200 images as a few swifts fed in one of the bays of the main pool, occasionally coming close enough for a reasonable-sized image. Of those 200 shots, I kept just six... But this is one of the main advantages of using digital; I no longer have to worry about wasting huge amounts of film for virtually no results.' Plate 238 is an excellent shot, and Steve has highlighted a major advantage of the digital format, which perhaps encourages a more flexible approach to photography in cases like this. We are delighted to welcome Craghoppers as a new sponsor to the Bird Photograph of the Year awards this year. The company has donated a 'Mule Gilet' (featuring enough pockets for even the most demanding of photographers) as a prize for the top-placed digital photograph. Although Craghoppers, well-known as innovators of outdoor gear and travel wear, has not been traditionally associated with the birdwatching market, they offer an extensive range of clothing for anyone who loves being outdoors.

The second of the two images of Common Starlings in our top six this year was submitted by Alan Petty. Alan comments that he had been 'looking for an opportunity to try some slow-speed "action" shots of birds bathing. What I wanted to achieve was the chaos of a group of birds bathing communally, but with just one bird sharp in the centre. These starlings provided me with the chance to attempt this, and a roll and a half of film later, this shot was probably the closest to what I was after.' The judges commented that this image (plate 239) represents an excellent use of slow shutter speed to freeze the motionless bird, but at the same time gives vivid movement to the commotion of the bathing individuals. This is a situation where digital would have allowed many more shots to be taken, with perhaps a better chance of an outstanding result.

In seventh place, Larry Dalziel's delightful portrait of a Pygmy Owl *Glaucidium passerinum* shows the habitat of this diminutive owl superbly, with the deliberate placing of the owl off-centre working particularly well (plate 240).



241. EIGHTH. Great Crested Grebes *Podiceps cristatus*, Dudley, West Midlands, April 2003 (Canon EOS 10D; Sigma 500-mm f4.5 lens; 1/750, f6.7, ISO 400). *Tony Ellis*

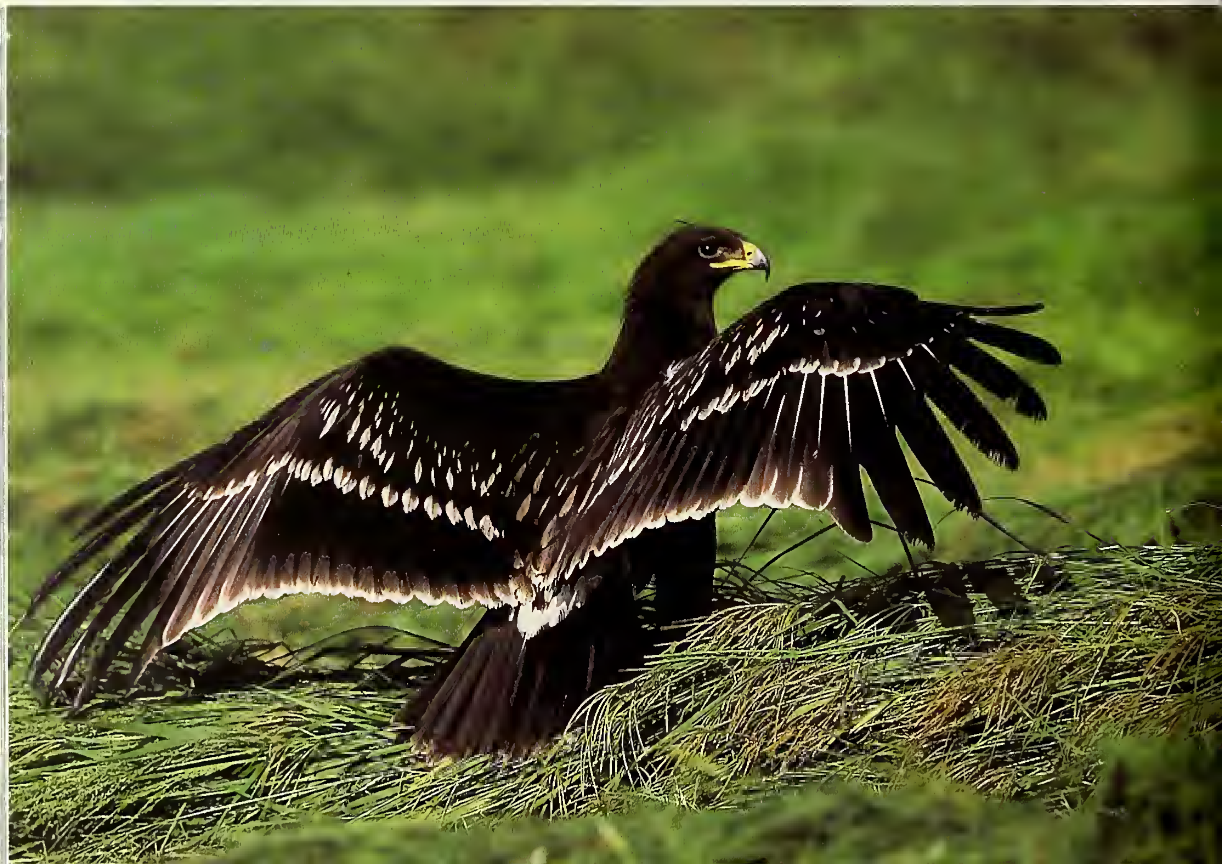
Larry had travelled to Finland in mid April specifically to try to photograph the various grouse that were beginning to lek at this time. 'After a particularly cold, snowy morning, my guide suggested that we should visit a place on the outskirts of Oulu that was a fairly regular breeding site for Pygmy Owls. After we arrived, he began to imitate the owl's calls, with instant and quite spectacular results! The bird immediately flew to a nearby tree, and I was able to take several images. I particularly liked the bird's "frowning" expression in this shot, while the snow on the ground has certainly helped to reflect light back onto the bird.'

In eighth place, a portrait of displaying Great Crested Grebes *Podiceps cristatus* by Tony Ellis has interesting lighting effects, with both birds sharp (plate 241). Tony provided the following background account to his photo: 'I had been watching this pair of grebes for some weeks, and though I had seen them mating (borrowing the nest of a Common Coot *Fulica atra* for the purpose), they did not seem to be settling down as a pair to nest and lay eggs. I was photographing them from the bank of the lake when a Great Crested Grebe from an adjoining territory came into their space. The male adopted an aggressive posture and saw off the interloper, whereupon the pair began a courtship display which lasted less than a minute.'

In ninth place, we have the second of three raptor shots from Oman. This one, like that in first place, features a Spotted Eagle at Sohar, and is a fine portrait of a bird in a spread-wing, almost heraldic pose (plate 242). Hanne Eriksen observes that during the winter months Spotted Eagles are most often found near water or at rubbish tips, but that in winter 2003/04 quite a number remained on farmland in the northern part of the country, presumably attracted by irrigation and large green areas, where their diet consisted primarily of grasshoppers (Acrididae). 'As with most large eagles, these are difficult birds to approach closely, but a few seemed reasonably unafraid, and allowed a closer approach. The majestic beauty and feather detail on this juvenile did impress me.'

In tenth place, Roger Tidman's Gull-billed

242. NINTH. Juvenile Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*, Sohar, Oman, November 2003 (Canon EOS 1V; Canon EF 400-mm f4 IS lens; 1/400, f4, Fuji Velvia 50). *Hanne Eriksen*



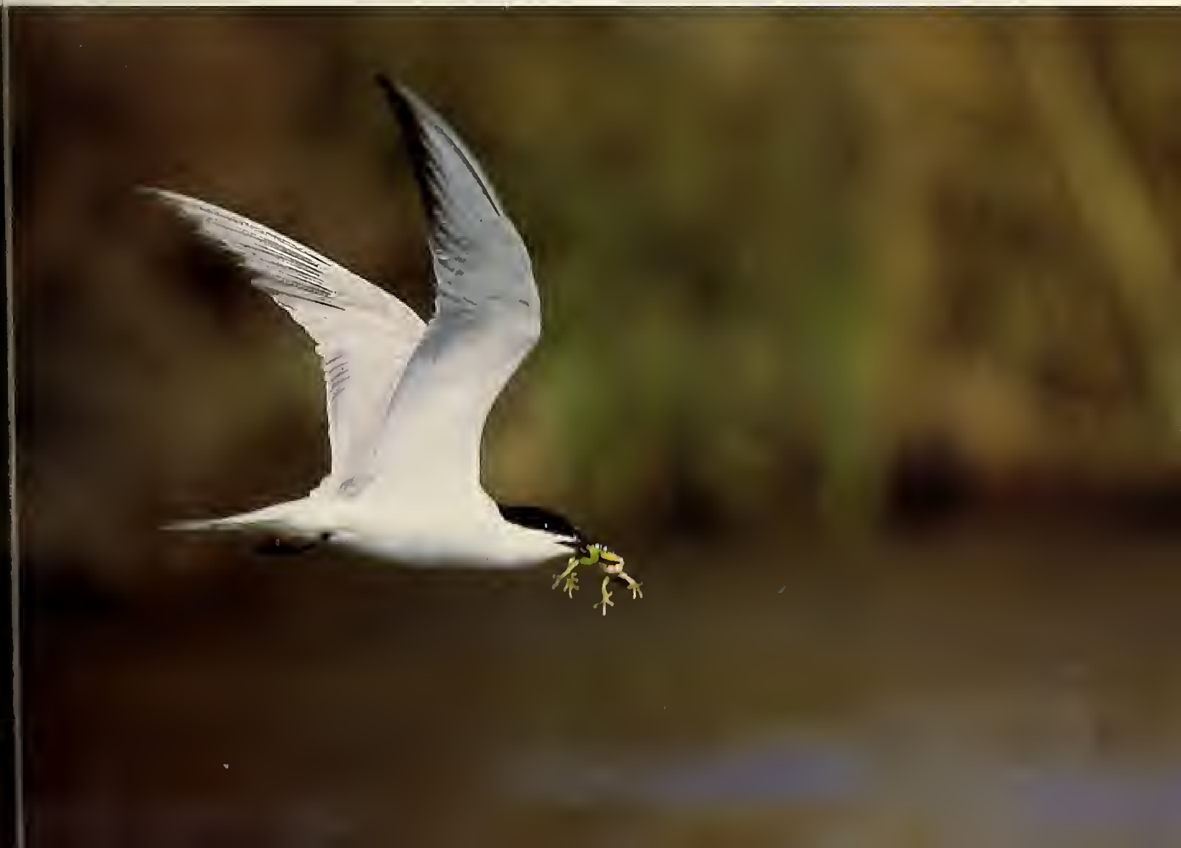
Tern *Sterna nilotica* is the second top-ten picture from Lesvos, and also the second to feature an unfortunate tree frog! This is a super, sharp flight photo of the tern, with added interest provided by the food item (plate 243). *BWP* lists an amazingly wide range of food items for this species, including frogs.

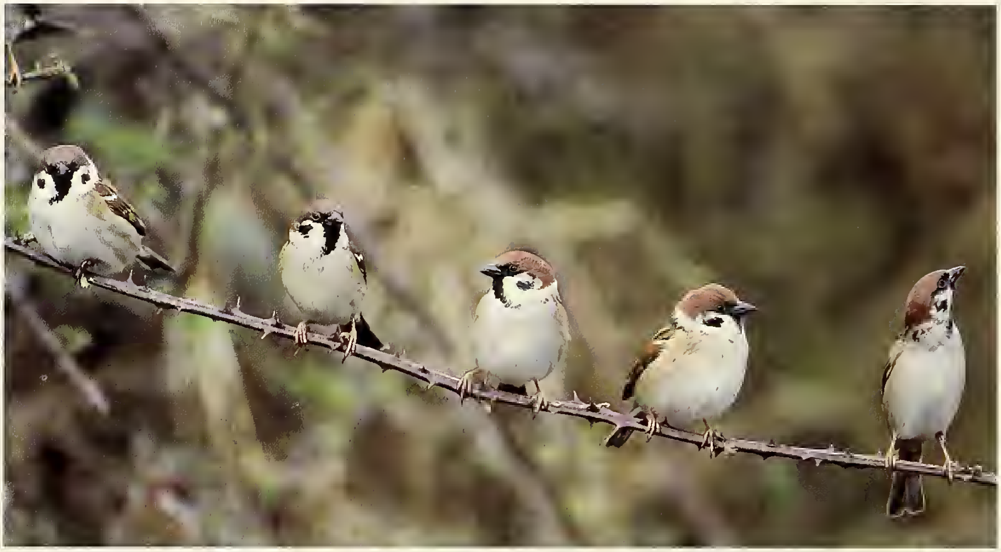
An absolutely charming photo of a group of five Tree Sparrows *Passer montanus* by Mike Wilkes was placed eleventh (plate 244). On a single strand of bramble, all in focus, and almost all looking at the photographer, the sparrows were well schooled! Mike describes how he has a regular flock of Tree Sparrows coming to a feeding station at Coughton, in Warwickshire, every winter. 'I start my winter baiting in early October, and in 2002 several Tree Sparrows arrived within a few days. The flock gradually built up to approximately 30 by January (when this photo was taken), falling away to just half a dozen in late April.'

Finally, of the photos shown here, we end with another raptor photograph from the Eriksen's collection, again featuring a Spotted Eagle, this time with a Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* (plate 245). Jens sets the scene as follows: 'I came across a juvenile Spotted Eagle sitting in a wet, marshy area. It had evidently stuffed itself with prey of some kind and could no longer face another bite. Nearby sat a Marsh Harrier, and I moved my car into position to see what might develop. Shortly afterwards, the harrier moved in and the two birds sat staring at each other for a long time. At times the harrier would try to steal a bit of food with one foot, but it never dared to get its head underneath the eagle's watchful eyes and powerful beak. The whole scene was rather comical. Eventually, after many attempts, the Marsh Harrier was successful, and slipped away with a bone. I think that the eagle was just too stuffed and could not be bothered to respond!' Again, as with the winning photograph, the juxtaposition of the two birds intrigued the judges. In the absence of the winning shot this would probably have been placed higher, but these two, together with Hanne Eriksen's eagle, were so similar that it was clear, even when judged anonymously, that these three shots were closely 'related'.

No entries were received from young pho-

243. TENTH. Gull-billed Tern *Sterna nilotica*, Lesvos, Greece, May 2003 (Canon EOS 3; Canon 500-mm f4.5 lens; 1/640, f5.6, Fuji Sensia 100). *Roger Tidman*



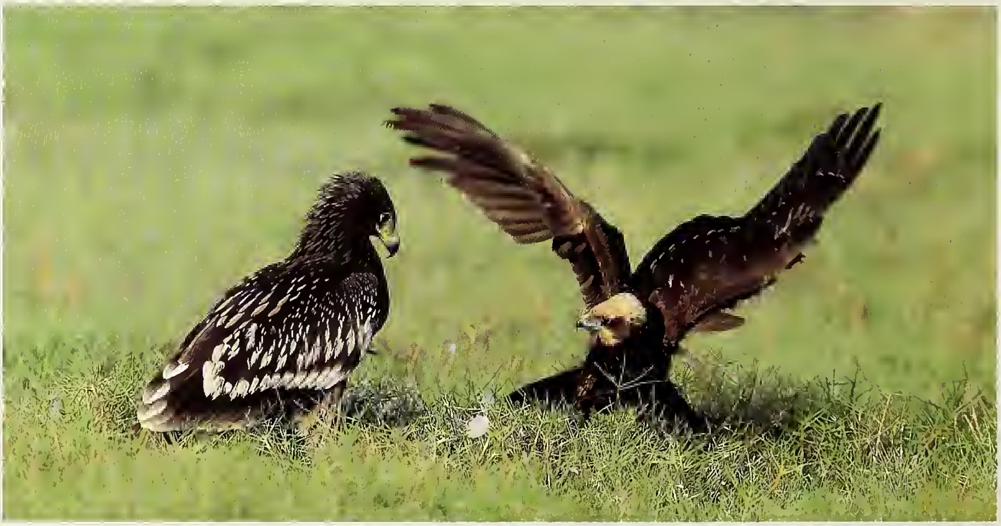


244. ELEVENTH Tree Sparrows *Passer montanus*, Coughton, Warwickshire, January 2003 (Canon EOS 3; Canon 500-mm f4 lens; Fuji Sensia 100, rated at 250 ASA). *Mike Wilkes*

tographers, so the traditional prize supported by The Eric Hosking Charitable Trust was not awarded this year. We very much hope that this will not be the case next year, and urge readers to encourage all young photographers to consider entering this competition in 2005.

The prizes for the winner, second and third place will be presented at this year's British Birdwatching Fair at Rutland Water, in August. We wish to take this opportunity to thank our sponsors, Sprayway (www.sprayway.com), HarperCollins (www.harpercollins.com), A&C Black (www.acblack.com), Craghoppers (www.craghoppers.com) and The Eric Hosking Charitable Trust, once again for their support, without which this competition would not continue. Next year's competition will assess photographs taken during 2004, and the rules will be announced in the January 2005 issue of *BB*, and on our website (www.britishbirds.co.uk).

Prof. Richard Chandler, Tim Appleton, Robin Chittenden, David Hosking and David Tipling
c/o 4 Kings Road, Oundle, Peterborough PE8 4AX



245. TWELFTH. Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga* and Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*, Khawr Taqah, Oman, November 2003 (Canon EOS 1V; Canon EF 600-mm f4 IS lens, with 1.4x converter; 1/60, f9, Fuji Velvia 50). *Jens Eriksen*

XV(35598 1.1

King Bertie of Minsmere

Derek Moore

Inspired by the recent piece on Denzil Harber by Tony Marr (*Brit. Birds* 96: 132-134), I reflect here on another giant of the pioneering days of birding and nature conservation. It would be churlish not to acknowledge the enormous contribution made to ornithology that Herbert Axell MBE so eloquently described in his books *Minsmere: Portrait of a Bird Reserve* (with Eric Hosking; Hutchinson, London, 1977) and *Of Birds and Men* (Book Guild, Sussex, 1992) – in fact, his efforts were truly outstanding, and the number of 'scrapes' on nature reserves throughout the world are a further tribute to him. Bert was, however, a difficult character and ruled Minsmere as something of a tyrant when dealing with colleagues at the RSPB, volunteers, members and reserve visitors. That is not to say he could not be the most charming and perfect of hosts, but many never saw this side of a man of considerable physical stature and acid tongue.

As with many successful men, Bert was cajoled and encouraged by his wife, Joan. Tony Marshall, a regular at Minsmere, described Joan wickedly but aptly as 'the Rear Axell'. It was she who set the moral standards of the reserve, and woe betide anyone who got on the wrong side of Joan. It was in the 1960s that a small group of volunteers, including me, used to go regularly to the reserve each weekend to assist with the construction of the scrape, in exchange for the run of Minsmere to satisfy our birding lust. On one occasion, I remember that we were particularly excited, as a young female volunteer had appeared for the first time. 'She will be staying in that hut for a few weeks,' beamed Bert. We were delighted. Returning the next weekend, we discovered to our horror that the hut was deserted and the young lady departed. In blissful ignorance, I enquired of Joan where she had gone. 'Dismissed!' came the sharp reply. Feeling that she needed to explain further, she offered, 'The hussy was inflaming my Herbert. She hung her flimsy underwear out to dry in full view of his office!'

Bert ruled Minsmere as if he were the head of a kingdom. He chose who would be allowed in and who would not. In those early days, you had to write to The Lodge for a permit in advance, and Bert would run his eye over the list to see if any of his 'blacklisted' names appeared. One fine morning in June 1971, there was a superb female Wilson's Phalarope

Eric Hosking

246. Bert's Hut (aka the Visitor Centre), Minsmere, Suffolk, 1960s. The Hut was truly his domain, and many feared to cross its threshold. Bert would sit at his battered typewriter, peering over his small spectacles, and visitors could never predict whether he would welcome them with gushing charm or send them packing in a fit of rage. I will never forget the Hut, now safely demolished.

Phalaropus tricolor on the scrape, but the reserve was closed that day and no visitors were about. Nonetheless, assistant warden David Mower had found David Tomlinson on the beach so had invited him in to enjoy our North American visitor. Bert turned up minutes later and, after blowing his top, ejected David on the grounds that he worked for the *Shooting Times*! You could be blacklisted for almost anything, but it depended on Bert's mood on the day. This even applied to loyal volunteers.

Bert had the same attitude with colleagues from The Lodge, especially those senior to himself. I have seen him tell a very senior member of staff to go away because they had not made an appointment and he was busy. They were told to come back at a more convenient time. The exact opposite was true if, in Bert's eyes, the visitors were important or influential. A small cabal of celebrities enjoyed favoured status at Minsmere, which, I have to say, included the regular volunteers. Household names now sadly gone like Freddie Grizewood, Joyce Grenfell and Robert Dougall were regular visitors, as were members of the Royal Family. Not all celebrity birders fared so well though, and Bill Oddie was among those shown the gate during the early days.

The day at Minsmere began at dawn if you were a volunteer. The first job was to scour the reserve for birds and, in particular, look for rarities. Bert believed that the bigger the list of species that could be found the more status the reserve would enjoy. My regular partner in those days was the late Brian Brown, of Lowestoft. Searching the scrape and beach, we managed to find a national rarity on several occasions. I remember particularly a Richard's Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae* in October 1969, which was the second record for Suffolk. We made our notes and, when satisfied, jogged back to the centre to tell Bert. He leapt up onto his trusted tractor (see plate 247) and went off to see the bird. Brian and I handed in our written-up descriptions and relaxed, happy that our ID was accepted by Bert. We were less enthusiastic when the record, duly accepted by BBRC, was published and credited to H. E. Axell *et al.*! This became a regular practice and we never complained lest we were banished forever. Incidentally, the late Michael Seago always referred to me as '*et al.*' until his death in 1999.

Other regulars began to doubt Bert's own ability to identify birds in his fanatical rush to add more and more to the reserve list. Certainly, his own confidence was visibly shaken when his Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis* of autumn 1973 was adjudged not acceptable even though he had caught and ringed the bird (*Brit. Birds* 72: 270-271). To this day there are competent observers (not me – I was not present) who doubt the accepted records of Pechora Pipit *A. gustavi* and Upland Sandpiper *Bartramia longicauda* (suspecting Tree Pipit *A. trivialis* and Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* respectively) from Minsmere, but never disagreed publicly because they surely would have been banned for life.

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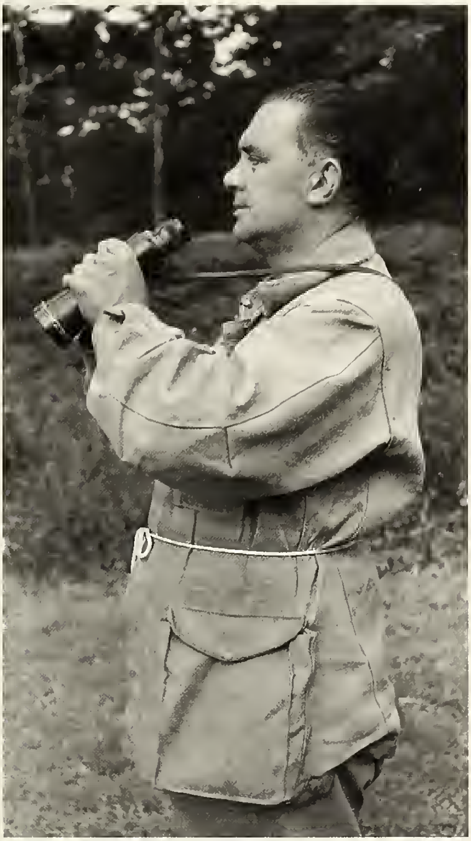
247. Bert with his beloved tractor, Minsmere, Suffolk, September 1961. All and sundry used to ride on the tractor, sitting on the bonnet or tumbling about in the bucket, with Bert proudly at the wheel, a modern-day Health & Safety nightmare.

Bert was not terribly interested in people or birds on adjacent reserves or sites. Previous to joining the Minsmere band, I had spent much time with the Dingle Bird Club at nearby Walberswick. I had been introduced here by my old schoolmaster, Chris Benson. I often wondered why both these great men never mentioned each other, only to be told later that Bert refused to speak to Benson and had banned him from the reserve because Benson did not agree with his assessment of the number of Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* nests in one particular year. On another occasion, there was a Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes githagineus* at Sizewell, the first for the UK. I was working with Bert on the scrape and I asked what the small band of birders moving down the beach were after. 'Just an escape,' he retorted, 'not worth bothering with.' So I didn't and, as far as I know, nor did he (and as a result I have yet to see this species in Britain).

Bert had arrived at Minsmere from Dungeness, in his native Kent. He had worked for the Post Office before that and was an officer in the army, where he learnt his surveying and engineering skills, so essential when creating habitats at Minsmere. He also invented the modern-day ringing pliers (originally known as 'Dungeness pliers') as well as a peculiar harness made from parachute cord which ensured that your binoculars did not swing about when walking or ringing, for example (plate 248). His great success at a time when the RSPB had little money was due, in no small measure, to his supreme resourcefulness – he was truly a man of his time. Like so many others of his generation, he would have found things much more difficult in the modern era with the need to comply with rigorous Health and Safety guidelines.

On his retirement, Bert moved to the edge of the Minsmere reserve, which in hindsight was perhaps a mistake. Certainly, his successor, the likeable Jeremy Sorenson, stood no chance with Bert, who – bizarrely – effectively banned himself from his beloved reserve. Only when Geoff and Hilary Welch took over a decade later was Bert back and established as a fixture at Minsmere. Thankfully, he was then able to enjoy his creation and bask in the glory with those visitors old enough to remember him. Sadly, Bert and Joan became very infirm and were restricted in their latter years to home, hospital or nursing homes, definitely not the preferred habitat of a man like Bert. They passed away within a few weeks of each other in 2001. Their only child, Roderick, spoke of his father at his funeral, sadly attended by few who had enjoyed the freedom of Minsmere. Roderick referred to their family name of Axell, of Nordic origin and said to date back to Viking royalty. The latter were renowned for being arrogant, self-assured, self-confident and certain that their opinion was the only one of substance, and it was Roderick who pointed out the similarity between the legend and his father.


Eric Hosking

248. Bert modelling his ingenious parachute-cord harness, which took some of the strain of using heavy binoculars, August 1960.

It is my belief that people who have pushed back the barriers in whatever they do need the qualities which many people found so unacceptable in Bert. His single-mindedness got the job done when others might have given up. Personally, I found Bert inspiring. After all, he had once played in a cricket team which had dismissed the opposition for nought. He changed my approach to birdwatching too, and led me into nature conservation. Indeed, many of us working in conservation may have inherited some of his qualities. He was a Big Man in every sense, and rightly earned the title so mischievously applied by us volunteers as *King Bertie of Minsmere.*

Derek Moore
Rowan Howe, Gors Road, Salem, Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire SA19 7LY

Notes

Spring raptor migration at Ustica, southern Italy

The island of Ustica, lying at 38°42'N 13°12'E in the Tyrrhenian Sea, is approximately 60 km north of western Sicily and 270 km northeast of the Cap Bon promontory in Tunisia (fig.1). Although covering an area of only 7,600 ha, its isolation makes it attractive to migrant birds. In order to establish the importance of Ustica for the spring migration of raptors in the Mediterranean basin, counts of migrating raptors were made from the highest point of the Falconiera promontory, which dominates the northeast coast of the island, between 22nd March and 20th May 2002.

Spring raptor migration in southern Italy

Each spring, thousands of raptors cross the Mediterranean Sea between Africa and southern Italy during their northward migration to European breeding areas. Within this region, the largest concentrations have been reported at the Strait of Messina, between southern mainland Italy and Sicily (fig. 1). Corso (2001) documented an average of 26,062 raptors migrating across the Strait of Messina each spring between 1996 and 2000 (table 1). At this site, raptors crossing the Strait of Sicily, between the Cap Bon peninsula and western Sicily, converge with those migrating north from Libya to southern Sicily, via Malta (fig. 1).

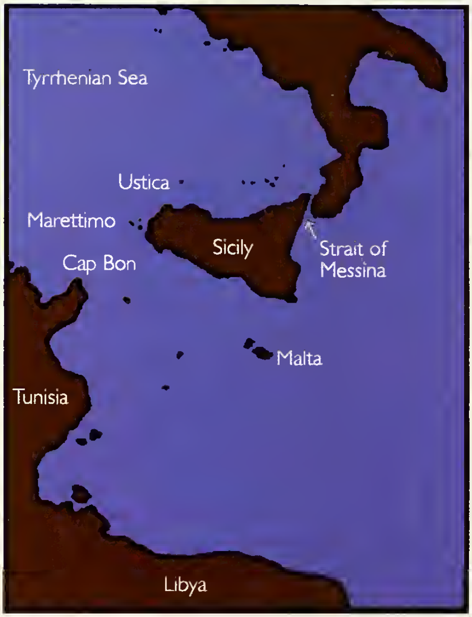


Fig. 1. Map showing the position of Ustica, and other key raptor migration watchpoints in the central Mediterranean.

Some species, particularly those with relatively long wings, including Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*, harriers *Circus*, kites *Milvus* and

Michele Panuccio

249. The Falconiera promontory, Ustica, southern Italy, April 2002.

Table 1. Number of raptors observed on Ustica, southern Italy, from 22nd March to 20th May 2002. These are compared with those recorded at the Strait of Messina during spring migration 1996-2000, based on data from Corso (2001).

Species	Ustica, spring 2002	Strait of Messina, spring 1996-2000 (minimum-maximum)
Honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus*	1,822	16,700-27,297
Black Kite *Milvus migrans*	302	546-1,008
Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*	2	1-4
Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*	1,174	1,621-3,074
Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*	1	3-84
Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*	44	25-83
Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*	129	155-866
Pallid/Montagu's Harrier *Circus macrourus/pygargus*	86	33-159
Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*	3	2-14
Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo buteo*	6	18-74
'Steppe Buzzard' *Buteo buteo vulpinus*	3	12-36
Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus*	1	5-19
Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*	8	10-19
Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*	30	18-46
Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*	28	464-934
Lesser/Common Kestrel *Falco naumanni/tinnunculus*	176	48-127
Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*	53	135-1,012
Hobby *Falco subbuteo*	65	97-276
Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonorae*	4	4-28
Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*	1	9-25

falcons *Falco*, regularly undertake sea crossings using powered flight (Kerlinger 1989). After crossing the Strait of Sicily, some continue migrating over the Tyrrhenian Sea towards central Italy via the island of Ustica, thus bypassing the Strait of Messina (Agostini 2002). This involves a further sea crossing in excess of 300 km between western Sicily and the Italian peninsula.

Results and discussion

A total of 3,938 migrating raptors was counted at Ustica during 540 hours of observations between 22nd March and 20th May 2002 (table 1). Of these, the most abundant species were Honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus* (1,822), Marsh Harrier *C. aeruginosus* (1,174), Black Kite *M. migrans* (302) and Montagu's Harrier *C. pygargus* (129). Counts of migrating raptors were grouped into ten-day periods, and the numbers recorded within each interval were then compared to establish peak passage periods.

Honey-buzzard

A total of 1,530 Honey-buzzards passed over Ustica during the first ten days of May. Numbers peaked on 10th May, when 542 birds, 29.8% of the spring total, were counted. Of these, it was estimated that 1,475 (96.4%) were adults, the remainder being first-summers. Many first-summer Honey-buzzards are known to spend the northern summer in Africa, (Forsman 1999), so the low total recorded is not unexpected.

Marsh Harrier

Marsh Harriers migrate earlier than Honey-buzzards, and passage is concentrated within the first ten days of April (fig. 2). Passage peaked on 1st April, when 314 were counted. Our observations confirmed that first-summer birds migrate later than adults and, among adults, males earlier than females (fig. 2). The total number of males, females and immatures recorded during each ten-day period was estimated by multiplying the proportion of individuals of known age/sex by the total count (see Kjellén 1992). To avoid the potential bias resulting from the easier identification of adult males, the proportion of females and immatures was estimated by dividing known females/immatures between the two age classes according to their proportion among the identified birds. It proved possible to establish the age/sex of 422 Marsh Harriers in total (58, 198, 46, 46, 53, 21 during each ten-day period respectively).

During the first two of the six ten-day

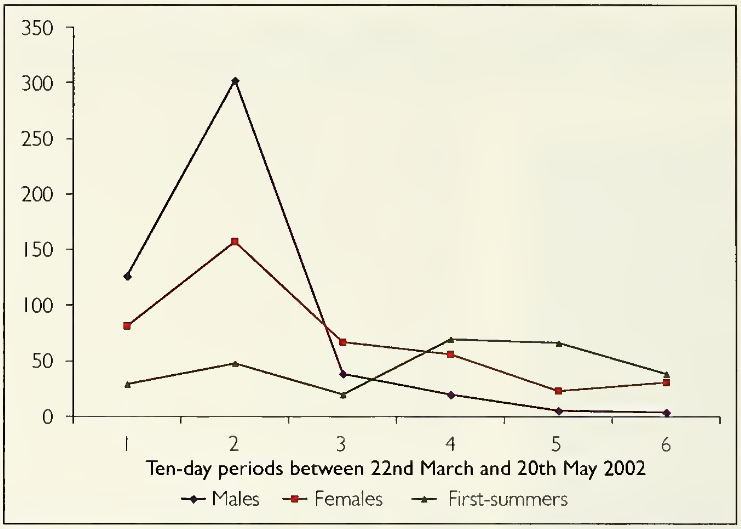


Fig. 2. The occurrence of migrating Marsh Harriers *Circus aeruginosus* over Ustica, southern Italy, between 22nd March and 20th May 2002, during the six ten-day periods of the study.

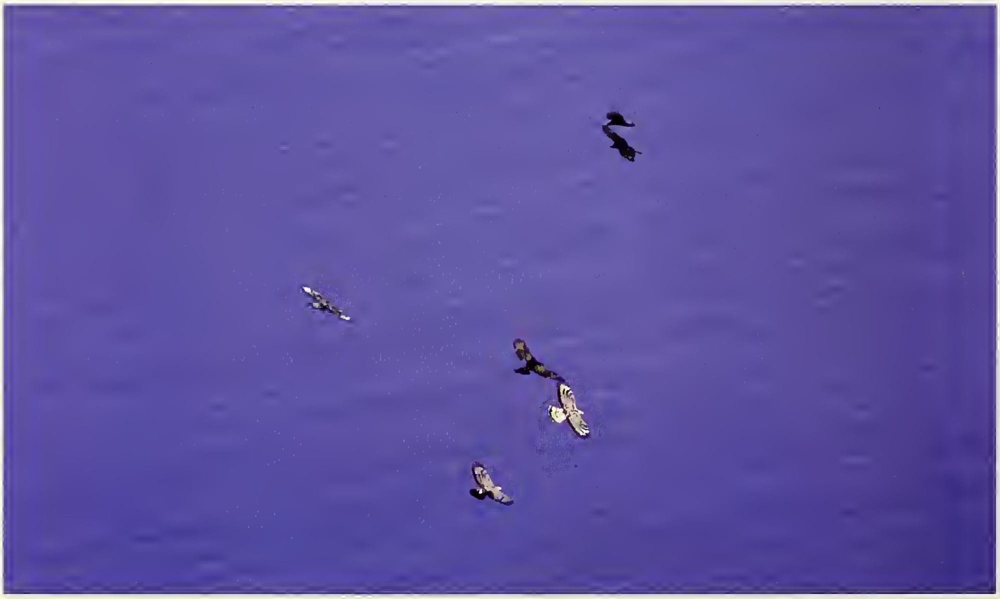
periods, males (428) outnumbered females (238) ($\chi^2 = 53.64$, d.f. = 1, $P < 0.01$), while during the remaining four ten-day periods, females (176) outnumbered males (66) ($\chi^2 = 49.09$, d.f. = 1, $P < 0.01$). Moreover, of 277 birds reaching the northeast coast of the island and then pausing during migration, it is interesting to note that immatures (197) outnumbered adults (80) ($\chi^2 = 48.57$, d.f. = 1, $P < 0.01$). This difference may reflect the fact that immatures are less strongly motivated to migrate, so migration is more leisurely.

Black Kite

Our observations revealed that Black Kite did not show a peak passage period. This accords well with observations made at the Strait of Messina (Agostini 2002). Adults were recorded throughout the period, while immatures migrated only during the second month of observation. In this species, some pairs commence breeding in Europe at the end of March, while others do not start until May (Cramp & Simmons 1980).

Discussion

These observations establish that raptors crossing the Tyrrhenian Sea make use of Ustica in one of two ways: either as a temporary migration stopover during which birds can rest and feed, or as a means of gaining altitude on the rising thermals above the island before con-



Michele Panuccio

250. Honey-buzzards *Pernis apivorus*, Ustica, southern Italy, May 2002.

tinuing on their migration. Our data compare well with observations at the Strait of Messina and over Marettimo (Agostini & Logozzo 1998; Agostini 2001; Corso 2001). Not surprisingly, few broad-winged raptors, which require thermals of rising air to assist in their migration, were recorded on Ustica. Conversely, the low numbers of falcons and Ospreys reported during this survey probably reflects the fact that these species are less attracted by islands during sea crossings, being able to use powered flight with relatively low expenditure of energy, and thus migrating across a broad front (Kerlinger 1989).

Although based only upon a single season of observations, these findings seem to confirm the importance of Ustica for migrating raptors. Further studies are required to establish whether similar numbers pass each year, and these are planned. If numbers remain consistently high each spring, they may be sufficient to warrant the recognition of Ustica as an Important Bird Area for the spring migration of raptors in the Mediterranean basin (Grimmett & Jones 1989).

Acknowledgments

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Is the Conero promontory, central Italy, an important bridge for migrant raptors entering eastern Europe in spring?

Spring passage of raptors crossing the Mediterranean region is concentrated through three main bottlenecks: Gibraltar, the Strait of Messina and the Bosporus (Zalles & Bildstein 2000). Having crossed the Strait of Messina, raptors breeding in eastern Europe pass over the Apennines ridge and, from there, cross the Adriatic Sea. Recent studies by Gustin *et al.* (2002) suggest that the Conero promontory, located on the Adriatic coast of central Italy within the Monte Conero Natural Regional Park (43°32'N, 12°45'E) is a preferred starting point for this sea crossing (fig. 1). Nonetheless, raptor migration through the Conero promontory has, until recently, been poorly studied. In recent years, the Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli (LIPU) has co-ordinated a series of surveys, intended to establish the magnitude and diversity of migrating birds using this region. This paper presents the results of the first three years of these surveys, and highlights the need for further in-depth investigation.

Spring raptor movements at the Conero promontory

Between 1999 and 2001, daily observations were carried out from the Pian Grande watchpoint, located 415 m above sea level along the northern sector of the Conero promontory, to monitor the number of migrating raptors passing through this region. Observations commenced on 20th April and continued until 20th May, although in 2001 observations were also carried out from 20th March to 15th April. The number of observers varied daily, between two and ten, each equipped with 10× binoculars and

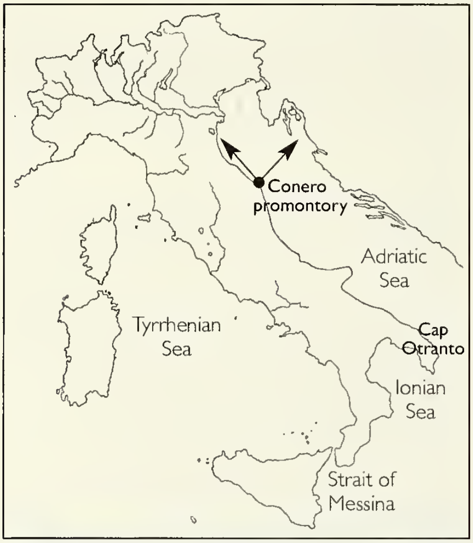

Fig. 1. The Conero promontory, central Italy, and key raptor migration flyways.

20-60× telescopes. During this three-year period, a total of 9,287 raptors, of 23 species, was recorded (table 1). The most numerous species were Honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus* and Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* (62.1% and 20.2% respectively of the total number of raptors counted). Occasional sightings of Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*, Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus*, Red Kite *Milvus milvus*, Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonorae* and Saker Falcon *F. cherrug* occur almost annually (table 1).

Of particular interest are the small numbers of raptors with a primarily eastern European breeding range which occurred annually at Conero. These included Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* (15 recorded during spring passage in 2000 and 2001), Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* of the race *vulpinus* ('Steppe Buzzard'; seven between 22nd April and 9th May 2000 followed, in 2001, by one on 8th May), Long-

Table 1. Numbers of raptors counted during spring migration at the Conero promontory between 20th April and 20th May during 1999-2001.

	1999	2000	2001	Totals	Mean 1999-2001
Honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus*	1,699	2,736	1,338	5,773	1,924
Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus*	-	2	-	2	0.7
Black Kite *Milvus migrans*	15	46	10	71	24
Red Kite *Milvus milvus*	4	4	3	11	4
Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*	-	2	-	2	0.7
Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*	2	3	5	10	3
Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*	503	732	647	1,882	627
Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*	1	4	9	14	5
Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*	-	5	10	15	5
Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*	27	32	49	108	36
unidentified harrier *Circus* sp.	2	45	37	84	28
Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*	18	21	62	101	34
Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*	67	78	22	167	56
'Steppe Buzzard' *Buteo buteo vulpinus*	-	7	1	8	3
Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*	-	1	-	1	0.3
Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*	1	1	-	2	0.7
Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus*	-	2	1	3	1
Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*	8	2	4	14	5
Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*	5	8	4	17	6
Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*	146	90	174	410	137
Lesser/Common Kestrel *Falco naumanni/tinnunculus*	2	6	3	11	4
Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*	38	163	22	223	74
Hobby *Falco subbuteo*	65	88	49	202	67
Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonorae*	-	1	1	2	0.7
Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus*	-	2	3	5	2
Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug*	-	1	-	1	0.3
unidentified falcon *Falco* sp.	-	30	26	56	19
unidentified raptor	41	23	28	92	31
Total number of individuals	2,644	4,135	2,508	9,287	3,096
Total number of species	15	23	19		
Mean daily number	85.2	133.4	80.9		99.8

legged Buzzard *B. rufinus* (one on 8th May 2000, and four during 21st-29th March 2001). Other species falling within this category included Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*, Lesser Kestrel *F. naumanni* and Red-footed Falcon *F. vespertinus*.

The Conero promontory has also proved a good site for vagrant raptors, including Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus* and Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*, while undoubtedly the most exceptional record involved a Levant Sparrowhawk *Accipiter brevipes* seen on 22nd March 2001. Although a vagrant to Italy, this observation, together with the capture of an individual on the Monte San Bartolo in spring 2003 (www.ebnitalia.it), suggests that small numbers of Levant Sparrowhawks may follow the Italian Adriatic coast during spring passage.

Is the Conero promontory a migration bottleneck?

A long history of observations in Italy has clearly established that the main entry point for raptors into the Italian Peninsula is via the Strait of Messina (Giordano 1991; Corso 2001). Their subsequent onward movements are poorly understood, in particular of those species which breed to the east and northeast of Italy. As yet, there are no observations to suggest whether migrating raptors concentrate through some mountain passes of the Apennines, or pass over these mountains in small numbers and on a broad front. Furthermore, other than Conero, no other locations along the Adriatic Sea coast of Italy are known to concentrate migrating raptors prior to their departure for the Croatian and Slovenian coast. The data presented in this paper suggest that the Conero promontory is an important departure point in spring, and forms a primary flyway for the spring crossing of the Mediterranean basin (Gustin *et al.* 2002).

The numbers of some raptor species recorded at the Conero promontory exceed those at other important central Mediterranean sites, with the exception of the Strait of Messina (Baghino & Leugio 1990; Pandolfi & Sonet 2001, 2003; Gustin *et al.* 2002). As many of these raptors are of east European origin, this suggests that Conero is particularly important for raptors crossing the Strait of Messina from wintering sites in northern or western Africa. During each year of this study, large groups of Honey-buzzards were observed flying out to sea. This observation is particularly noteworthy, as it has been established that this species rarely makes flights across the open sea in large flocks, and only does so at a small number of preferred sites. This again suggests that Conero forms an important location where Honey-buzzards concentrate prior to crossing the open sea (Agostini 1994 *et al.* a,b; Borioni 1995).

Compared with other central Mediterranean migration bottlenecks, autumn movements at Conero occur on a limited scale only (Corso 2001; Agostini 2002). For example, in September 2001, only 206 raptors of 12 species were counted during 30 days of observations. The most numerous species were Marsh Harrier and Honey-buzzard (representing 41.7% and 31.5% of all raptors respectively). Such data support the hypothesis that migrating raptors follow different routes in spring and autumn throughout the Mediterranean basin (Agostini & Logozzo 1995, 1997; Agostini 2002; Corbi *et al.* 1999; Zalles & Bildstein 2000).

Other species

In addition to concentrating migrating raptors, Conero has proved attractive to other migratory soaring birds, including White *Ciconia ciconia* and Black Storks *C. nigra* (Gustin *et al.* 2003). Passage of typical Mediterranean species, such as European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*, Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica*, Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*, Sardinian Warbler *S. melanocephala* and Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus bonelli*, is also concentrated here.

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Footnote: Since 1999, LIPU has organised spring surveys on the Conero promontory. An overnight stay for birders participating in the co-ordinated programme of raptor data collection is provided on a no-charge basis. For more information, visit the LIPU website, www.lipu.it

Exceptionally dark-plumaged Hobbies or normal Eleonora's Falcons?

In their paper discussing a previously unknown plumage variant of the Hobby *Falco subbuteo*, Corso & Monterosso (2000) described several exceptionally dark juvenile Hobbies encountered in southern Italy, alongside Hobbies of typical appearance. Although Corso & Monterosso clearly took great care with their observations, the arguments they presented to distinguish 'dark Hobby' from Eleonora's Falcon *F. eleonorae*, in particular second-calendar-year (2nd cy) dark-morph males, are not entirely convincing. In their original note, no mention is made of the observed distance between typical and dark Hobbies, or to what extent the interactive behaviour during such encounters matched the normal behaviour of the species.

Eleonora's Falcon is an extremely variable species and, in addition to plumage variation among juveniles, adult males and females, exhibits three basic colour morphs, each of which can show a high degree of polymorphism (Ristow *et al.* 1998). Similarly, Hobby can also exhibit colour variation, although this is not as extensive as that in light-morph Eleonora's Falcon. The entirely dark juvenile plumage of some Eleonora's Falcons was described by Heinroth (1899), who also noted the characteristic barring of the tertials in juvenile and 2nd cy individuals. Heinroth also established that the tail length of 2nd cy Eleonora's Falcon is much shorter than that of the adult, making it appear structurally quite different. These features have, perhaps surprisingly, been largely overlooked by subsequent authors, including Walter (1979), Cramp & Simmons (1980), and Forsman (1999a), and this may have led to some misunderstanding of the field characters of this species.

Corso & Monterosso (2000) were at least partially aware of these deficiencies in the published information. During July and August, when they observed their 'dark Hobbies', 2nd cy Eleonora's Falcons would typically be hundreds of kilometres from their breeding colonies (this is supported by ringing recoveries as well as observations; Ristow & Wink 1992). Although the behaviour of these wandering 2nd cy Eleonora's remains unstudied, it is quite possible that such birds from the island colonies of southern Italy may occur in the area where Corso & Monterosso made their observations. Moreover, Hobbies and Eleonora's Falcons are known to feed communally on flying insects in Tanzania, Somalia, and Syria during winter and on spring migration (Archer & Godman 1937; Turner 1978; Baumgart 1991), so similar behaviour during the summer months is not inconceivable. It should also be remembered that Hobbies are quite tolerant of conspecifics in their breeding territories, particularly in continental Europe (Cramp & Simmons 1980), so it is also possible that both species could feed communally on airborne insects in Italy in July and August. Under such circumstances, if a 'dark Hobby' is suspected, the possibility of it being a dark-morph Eleonora's Falcon must be thoroughly considered and discounted.

Separating 'dark' Hobby from dark-morph Eleonora's Falcon

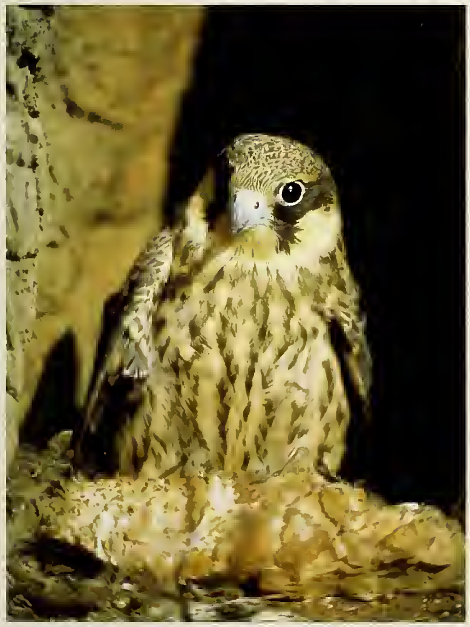
Corso & Monterosso (2000) ruled out homozygous dark-morph Eleonora's because of its rarity, and this is reinforced by their description of the plumage and bill colour. Differences between the 'dark Hobbies' and *heterozygous* dark-morph Eleonora's Falcons are less clear cut, however. In fact, their description closely matches 2nd cy male Eleonora's Falcon of this common morph in most respects.

Tail length and structure

During their first year, the tail length of Eleonora's Falcon can be up to 30 mm shorter than that of the adult. As a consequence, young birds appear quite different in flight from the more familiar, longer-tailed adults which frequent the breeding colonies. In fact, characters such as size, structure, flight silhouette and behaviour are so similar to those of Hobby that it is not safe to separate the two in the field without also taking plumage characters into consideration.

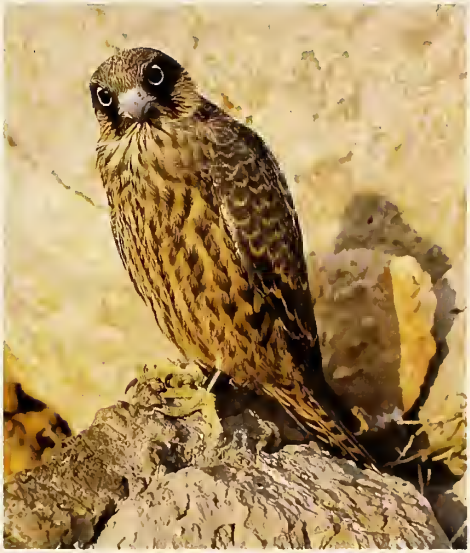
Plumage differences

Undoubtedly the most reliable means of separating most juvenile Eleonora's Falcons from most Hobbies lies in the size of the yellowish face pattern, which appears smaller in the former. Unfortunately, this feature cannot be used when considering 'dark Hobbies'. Corso & Monterosso state that their 'recently fledged dark Hobbies' were aged by the pale tail-tip, yet they lacked pale fringes to the mantle feathering, wing-coverts and remiges. The absence of such fringes would, however, be unique among *juvenile* falcons of any species. Other possibilities include 2nd cy 'dark' Hobby as well as 2nd cy Sooty Falcon *F. concolor* and 2nd cy dark-morph Eleonora's Falcon. Under these circumstances, the colour and patterning of the tertials, scapulars, undertail-coverts and tail must be used for specific identification.



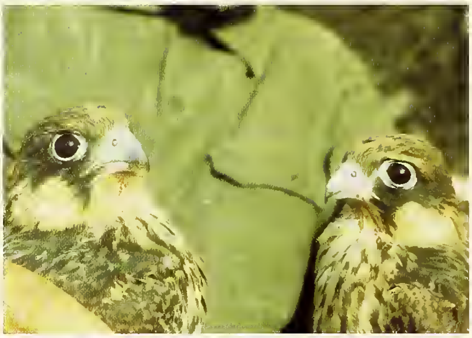
Dietrich Ristow

251. Juvenile light-morph Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonorae*, Crete, 6th October 1992. Approximately 98% of all juvenile Eleonora's Falcons superficially resemble juvenile Hobbies *F. subbuteo*, varying in colour between this light-morph juvenile and the heterozygous dark-morph depicted in plate 252.



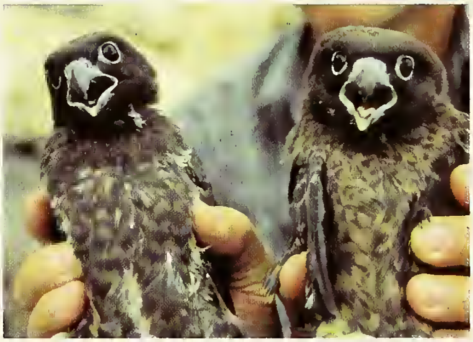
Dietrich Ristow

252. Juvenile heterozygous dark-morph Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonorae*, Crete, September 1988. Birds resembling this heterozygous dark-morph form approximately 28% of the population. Following the post-juvenile moult, second-calendar-year birds are similar to dark-morph adults, although some are slightly paler. Such individuals, still retaining the shorter juvenile rectrices, may appear almost identical to a dark Hobby *F. subbuteo*.



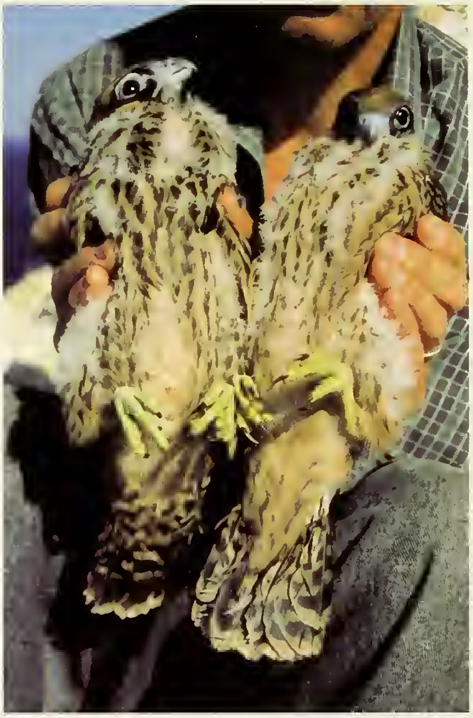
D. Ristow & L. Witte

253. Juvenile light-morph Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonorae*, Crete, September 1999. Up to 70% of the population resemble this familiar colour morph. In their second calendar-year, the young are closely similar to light-morph adults, but can be aged by the presence of retained juvenile rectrices and tertials.



D. Ristow & L. Witte

255. Juvenile homozygous dark-morph Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonorae*, Crete, September 1998. This is the rarest of the three morphs, accounting for about 2% of the entire population. The dark plumage is apparent at all ages, including juveniles. In their second calendar-year, these birds are darker than similar-aged birds of the heterozygous dark-morph, but the adults appear almost identical, although the darker bill colour of the homozygous dark-morph can be used to separate most individuals. Note: plates 253-255 show a female on the left and a male on the right.



D. Ristow & L. Witte

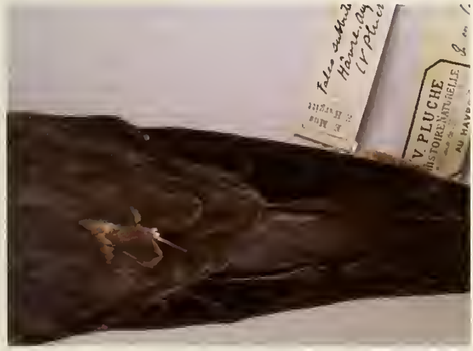
254. Juvenile heterozygous dark-morph Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonorae*, Crete, September 1998. Such juveniles are much paler than birds in the corresponding adult plumage. Following the post-juvenile moult, they appear almost as dark as adults, but are still separable by the retained juvenile rectrices and tertials.

Juvenile Hobbies show barring on the inner webs of all the secondaries, while the adjoining tertials either have no barring or, in some individuals, weak barring on the proximal half of the inner web of the longest tertial. The two longest scapulars are plain and lack barring, and their coverts have light barring of reduced contrast restricted to one web only. The scapulars are usually moulted before the return from the wintering grounds, but the juvenile tertials are retained until the second autumn or beyond.

Juvenile Sooty Falcon shows evidence of barring on the inner web of the innermost secondary, but this is reduced when compared with that on the remaining secondaries. In addition, the tertials, the two longest scapulars and their coverts never show any barring. Second-calendar-year Sooty Falcon can usually be identified by the presence of a characteristically broad subterminal band across the retained juvenile rectrices (Forsman 1999a). Caution is required though, as some homozygous dark juvenile female Eleonora's may also show this character.

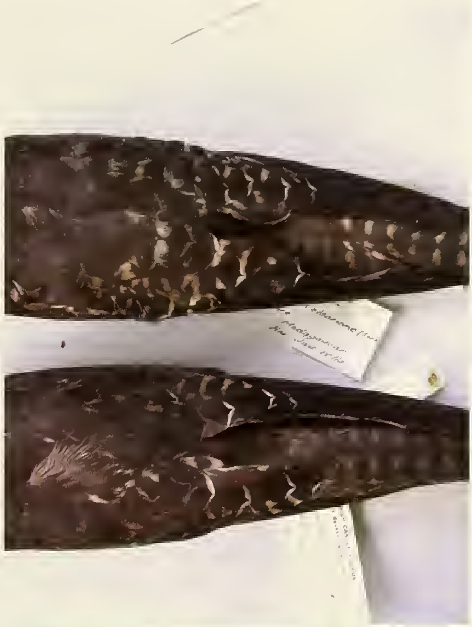
Juvenile Eleonora's Falcon differs from both juvenile Hobby and juvenile Sooty Falcon in exhibiting barring on both webs of the tertials (Heinroth 1899; Ristow & Wink 1992), and also on the scapulars, which are barred on either one or both webs. Although Forsman (1999a) does not mention this feature, it is discussed in Forsman (1999b). The juvenile scapulars are replaced during the first winter and their replacements are barred on one web only. The juvenile tertials are retained throughout the first summer and moulted after the second autumn (although there are occasional exceptions, for example specimen BNHM 1920.10.30.18 held in the NHM, Tring, which was collected on 23rd October). Their retention following the post-juvenile body moult is characteristic of 2nd cy Eleonora's Falcon, and can be used to separate birds of this age from Hobby or Sooty Falcon reliably. In 2nd cy birds, the ochre-coloured bars on the outer webs of the tertials are pale and quite heavily abraded, owing to the combined effects of wear and bleaching, but remain diagnostic. This feature is readily visible in several published images of 2nd cy light-morph Eleonora's Falcon, including those in Forsman (1999a, plate 599), Mather (1986, plate 113), and Conzemius (2000, plate 12). These individuals can be compared with Hobby of the same age – for example plates 639-641 in Forsman (1999a) – in which the tertials are plain and unmarked. Following replacement of the juvenile tertials, the second generation are also unmarked in Eleonora's Falcons, and then resemble those of Hobby and Sooty Falcon.

The pale feather fringes on the crown, back and wings of juvenile Eleonora's Falcon are broader than those of juvenile Hobby, but feathers retained beyond the first winter are heavily worn and the fringes become inconspicuous in both species (Forsman 1999a). The widest pale fringes occur on the unworn tail-tip, and measure typically 8 mm in Eleonora's Falcon and 5 mm in Hobby. Owing to the effects of abrasion during their second year, the pale tail-tip of Eleonora's can approach that of juvenile Hobby, and this must be considered when attempting to separate 'dark juvenile' Hobby from 2nd cy dark-morph Eleonora's Falcon in July/August.



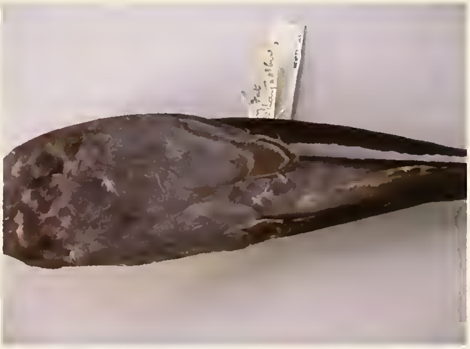
Peter Kennerley, © NHM, Tring

257. Second-calendar-year Hobby *Falco subbuteo*. Hobby moults the juvenile scapulars on the wintering grounds prior to returning to Europe, but the juvenile tertials are retained until the second autumn or beyond.



Peter Kennerley, © Natural History Museum, Tring

256. Second-calendar-year Eleonora's Falcons *Falco eleonorae*, homozygous dark-morph (top), heterozygous dark-morph (bottom). The barring of the retained juvenile tertials throughout the first summer is characteristic of second-calendar-year Eleonora's Falcon, and is a reliable character for separating birds of this age from Hobby *F. subbuteo* and Sooty Falcon *F. concolor*. These two individuals can be compared with a Hobby of the same age in plate 257, and a Sooty Falcon in plate 258, which both exhibit plain and unmarked tertials. Following the replacement of the juvenile tertials, the second-generation tertials are also unmarked, and then resemble those of Hobby and Sooty Falcon.



Peter Kennerley, © NHM, Tring

258. Second-calendar-year Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor*. Unlike those of Eleonora's Falcon *F. eleonorae*, the retained juvenile tertials of Sooty Falcon never show any barring. At this age, Sooty Falcon also displays a characteristic broad subterminal band across the retained juvenile rectrices that most Eleonora's Falcons lack, although some juvenile female homozygous Eleonora's Falcons may also show this character.

Bill

After fledging, the bill colour of both species remains unchanged, making this a useful character for identification at close quarters. The black tip to the bill of the 'dark Hobbies' which Corso & Monterosso (2000) described is, in fact, characteristic of heterozygous dark-morph Eleonora's Falcon, and not present on a typical Hobby. Only the bill colour of the homozygous dark-morph male Eleonora's closely matches the bill colour of Hobby (Ristow *et al.* 2000).

Bill colour of Hobby and Eleonora's Falcon is poorly described in the literature, and is worth describing in greater detail here. The bill colour of Hobby is generally illustrated as being similar in colour, and with the same colour gradient from the bill tip to the cere, to that of Common Kestrel *F. tinnunculus* and Peregrine Falcon *F. peregrinus.* In reality, the bill of Hobby is distinctly darker, this colour extending uniformly from the tip to the cere. Reflected light from the bill may create the impression of a paler bill base, but careful observation should establish the correct colour and pattern. The blackish bill is clearly visible in Forsman (1999a, plate 646), and Clark (1999, page 357.4). Occasionally, a minority of adult Hobbies may show a paler, greyish base to the bill, but this is most unusual (although it seems to occur more frequently in populations from eastern Europe and Asia). Without previous experience, it is not possible to know what the bill colour of a 'dark Hobby' would be, although it would be surprising if it was not at least as dark as that of a typical Hobby.

What are these dark Hobbies?

The patterning of the rectrices of the 'dark Hobbies' described by Corso & Monterosso (2000) does not match that of either juvenile Hobby or Eleonora's Falcon. Furthermore, when describing the typical patterning on the tail feathers of both species, Corso & Monterosso do not describe these correctly and may have perpetuated the error in Clark (1999), which illustrated the central rectrices of juvenile Eleonora's incorrectly in plate 41.1j. Both juvenile Hobby and juvenile Eleonora's Falcon have no barring (or, exceptionally, faint barring) on the central rectrices, such faint barring being more common in homozygous dark-morph Eleonora's.

Corso & Monterosso did not mention the tertials in their description of the 'dark juvenile Hobbies'. Instead, they noted indistinct pale fringes on the mantle feathers, an explanation of which would help specific identification. Could there be some misinterpretation, and, in reality, the reported detail refers to abraded tertials?

Although Corso & Monterosso (2000) described the unbarred undertail-coverts of the 'dark Hobbies', and suggested that this feature separates Hobby from Eleonora's Falcon, the reality is rather more complex. Juveniles of both species moult their undertail-coverts during their first winter. The subsequent generation are barred only in female Eleonora's, and not in males of the dark-morph (Ristow *et al.* 1998). Therefore, although their description of the unbarred undertail-coverts is consistent with that of Hobby, it does not exclude 2nd cy male Eleonora's.

If these two species really were interacting, as implied by Corso & Monterosso's observations, this raises some interesting, and speculative, insights into falcon behaviour. Is there more to it than simple exploitation of a common food source? Would 2nd cy male Eleonora's Falcons, as a colonial species in the phase of sexual maturation, show a tendency to join females of the slightly smaller Hobby? According to a hypothesis by Haas (2002), the moustachial stripe in falcons serves to amplify the warning signal in threatening postures. Are, then, dark-morph 2nd cy Eleonora's Falcons more likely to join the other species than light-morph 2nd cy birds? I would encourage Corso & Monterosso to continue their observations of these unusual dark falcons. Regardless of whether these turn out to be Hobbies or Eleonora's Falcons, the findings are extremely interesting, and there remains much to be learnt.

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Further comments on dark Hobbies in southern Italy

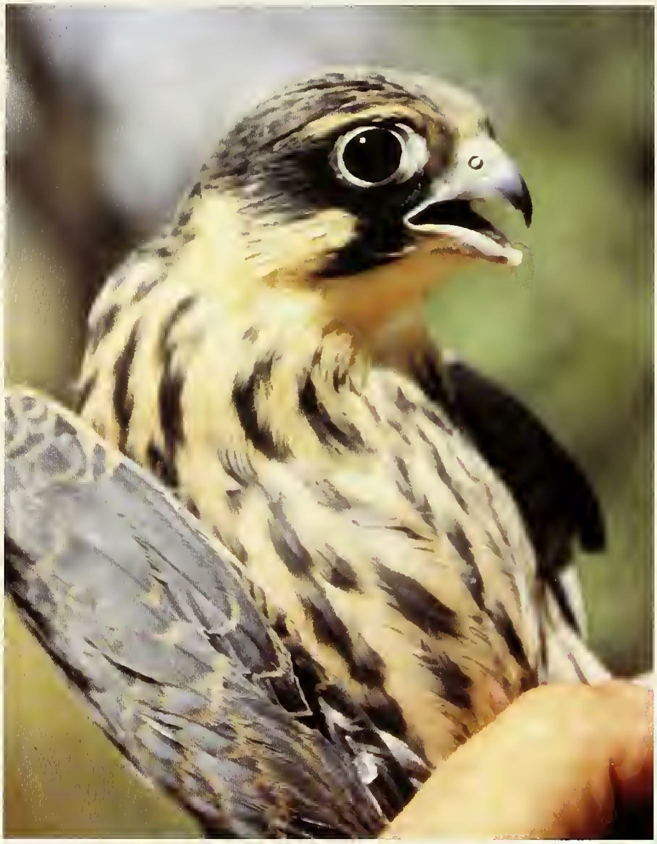
In our article discussing the appearance of several Hobbies *Falco subbuteo* in a previously undocumented dark plumage (Corso and Monterosso 2000), we sought to bring this aberrant plumage to the attention of a wider audience. Not surprisingly, it provoked considerable interest, including that from Dietrich Ristow (above). As the original article appeared in *Limicola*, and was written in German, it may be beneficial for *BB* subscribers to read a brief summary of the published findings in order to appreciate the discussion which follows here. During our research into the status of breeding Hobbies in the Sila Mountains, southern Italy, we encountered a total of seven recently fledged Hobbies which appeared particularly dark when compared with typical juveniles. All occurred among family parties (both adult and juvenile) of typical Hobbies, between July and September, when they were observed hunting communally for flying insects. Additional observations were made in pre-roost gatherings and at roosts. We believe that these dark Hobbies represent either melanistic or aberrantly plumaged birds.

Ristow (2004) suggests that these dark Hobbies may have been dark-morph Eleonora's Falcon *F. eleonorae*, and his comments provide a welcome and detailed summary of the identification criteria which distinguish Eleonora's Falcon from both Hobby and Sooty Falcon *F. concolor*. Nonetheless, there remain a number of inaccuracies in Ristow's note. Eleonora's Falcons do, in fact, occur regularly at several sites in southern Italy, either as single birds or in small flocks of up to 25 individuals (Liberatori *et al.* 1987; Corsetti 1990; Arcamone & Tellini 1991; Celletti & Meschini 1992; Felcher & Zorzenon 1997; Giovacchini & Celletti 1997). Summering birds are mainly in their second calendar year (2nd cy), but some adults also occur. The site at which many are found summering is regularly used, both by 2nd cy and adult birds, and we suspect that the same individuals return to familiar summering grounds each year. Furthermore, it seems that Hobbies do not hunt with Eleonora's Falcons, certainly in this part of southern Italy, and despite many hours of observations we have yet to observe a Hobby hunting communally with Eleonora's.

When we first encountered these dark Hobbies, we did, of course, consider the possibility that they might be either Sooty or Eleonora's Falcon, and were aware that the latter, being highly variable and with three distinct colour morphs, was the most likely species involved. After close and careful study, we concluded that the only species which fitted the structure, behaviour and some of the plumage characters of these birds was Hobby; and their close association with family parties of Hobbies reinforced this opinion. We firmly believe that our birds were dark Hobbies, and some of our reasons for maintaining this position are detailed below. The comments are divided into two sections, the first pertaining directly to Ristow's comments about dark-morph Eleonora's Falcon, the second of a more general nature.

The identification of dark-morph Eleonora's Falcon

Although we enjoyed good views of most of the dark Hobbies, not all birds were observed suffi-



Andrea Corso

259. Juvenile Hobby *Falco subbuteo*, Chokpak, Kazakhstan, September 2003. Note the relatively small and delicate bill, with a pale bluish base and an obviously contrasting black tip. A juvenile Eleonora's Falcon *F. eleonorae* would show a deeper, stronger, and more convex bill. In addition, the buffish-cream ground colour to the sides of the head and throat closely matches that of the entire underparts. In Eleonora's Falcon, the sides of the head appear darker and richer, but the differences can be variable, and should only be used to separate Hobby and Eleonora's Falcon along with other supporting characters. The intrusion of a second 'moustache', or tooth, onto the paler ear-coverts behind the eye is also clearly visible in this individual.

ciently closely to establish whether pale fringes or tips were present on the mantle, wing-coverts and remiges. Nonetheless, these were certainly present (but barely visible) on the closest individuals, and appeared a shade paler than the feather base. In addition, a thin pale line on the upperwing extended along the tips of the greater coverts, which was detailed in our original field sketches. It is possible that these fringes were present on all the birds but, being narrow and barely paler than the rest of the upperpart plumage, were not visible in the field. In many raptors which display a dark-morph juvenile plumage, the feather fringes tend to appear narrower, duller or darker, and less contrasting compared with those of typical juveniles. This was noted by (for example) Forsman (2003) on juvenile dark-morph Montagu's Harriers *Circus pygargus.*

In excluding heterozygous dark-morph Eleonora's, we established that the entire upperparts of our birds were uniformly brownish, including the tertials (as described and illustrated in Corso & Monterosso 2000). Since we did not observe conspicuously barred tertials, we concluded that they were not present. In July, it would not be expected that all the patterned juvenile tertials would have been replaced by plain, adult-type feathers.

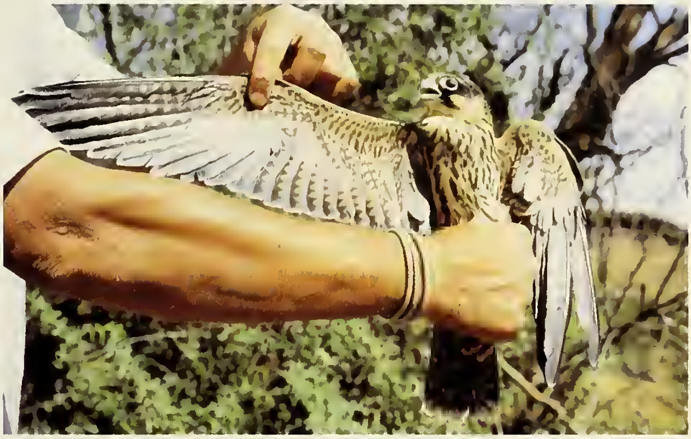
When seen from below, the bicoloured underwing is one of the most useful means of identifying Eleonora's Falcon. This feature is present in juveniles of both the homozygous and heterozygous dark-morphs, although the pattern is less contrasting than that of the adult. In comparison, the underwing of Hobby is uniform and invariably lacks an obvious pattern. The dark Hobbies that we observed displayed a uniform, darkish underwing with no contrast, although the remiges occasionally appeared paler and slightly translucent as the light passed through them. This is also a feature of typical Hobbies, especially juveniles; the weaker juvenile feathers wear more rapidly than those of adults, which enhances their translucence. Our experience suggests that the two-tone underwing pattern of 2nd cy Eleonora's Falcon is even more striking than in adults, owing to the bleaching of the retained juvenile remiges, which contrast with the fresh, dark underwing-coverts. This is certainly the case by July and August (the time of our observations), when non-breeding birds will have completed their body moult.

Ristow also makes several valid points regarding the undertail-covert colour and the effect of post-juvenile moult, but these comments merit further discussion. While juvenile

Hobbies can begin a partial post-juvenile moult on the wintering grounds, the extent of this is quite variable and often limited. During spring migration in southern Italy, it has been established that the majority of 2nd cy Hobbies still retain many juvenile feathers on the underparts. In particular, the retained juvenile undertail-coverts are considerably paler than those of adults, which are the familiar reddish colour (Corso in prep.). The dark Hobbies consistently showed pale undertail-coverts, which were noted as being distinctly paler than the rest of the underparts, which is consistent with juvenile Hobby. The underparts of a dark-morph 2nd cy Eleonora's would show dark undertail-coverts, which appear as dark as, or just a shade paler than, the body.

The separation of Eleonora's Falcon and Hobby

The dark Hobbies were always observed close to, and often alongside, typical Hobbies, both in flight and at rest. It was established to our complete satisfaction that they were structurally identical to the other Hobbies, and differed only in their darker plumage. Differences in flight structure and silhouette between Hobby and Eleonora's Falcon are well known to us (see Corso 2002). The shorter tail-length of juvenile and first-summer Eleonora's Falcons does indeed mean that their flight structure is closer to that of Hobby but, being aware of this feature,



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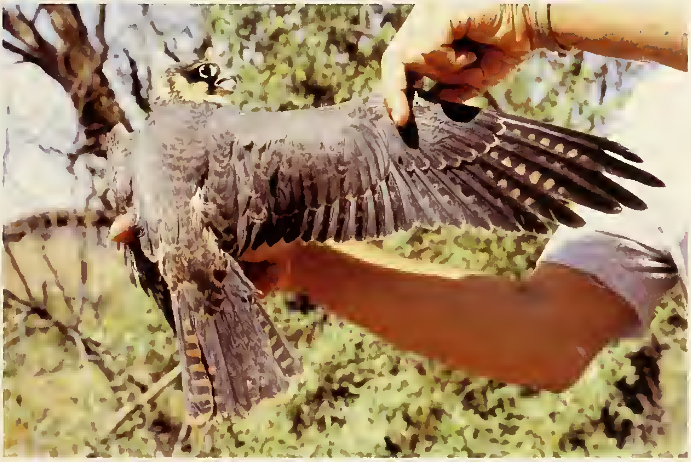
260. Juvenile Hobby *Falco subbuteo*, Chokpak, Kazakhstan, September 2003. The uniform appearance of the underwing of juvenile Hobby is clearly shown in this plate. Although some Hobbies can show a broader dark trailing edge to the underwing, this is never as dark, broad and contrasting in the field as that of juvenile Eleonora's Falcon *F. eleonorae* (for example, see Forsman 1999a, plate 593). Importantly, Hobby shows broader and darker marks on the underwing-coverts, which are particularly noticeable on the greater underwing-coverts. All dark-morph Eleonora's Falcons display a two-toned underwing, which is obvious in the field.



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261. Juvenile Hobby *Falco subbuteo*, Chokpak, Kazakhstan, September 2003. The upperparts of juvenile Hobby are characterised by the uniform appearance of the central rectrices, which lack any hint of barring, while the remainder are heavily barred. Some Eleonora's Falcons *F. eleonorae* show a trace of barring on the central rectrices, especially the subterminal broad band. Note that on some Hobbies, including this individual, the paler, rusty fringes to the upperwing and upperparts appear narrow and are barely visible. In dark-plumaged birds, whether a dark-morph, a melanistic individual or simply an aberrant bird, these fringes would appear much darker and be scarcely visible in the field. This apparent lack of fringing is, in fact, typical of many raptor species in their dark-morph plumage, where fringing appears to be restricted to the tips of the greater and primary coverts, and along the sides of the tail and tips of the remiges. Finally, note the broad and well-defined pale nape-patch on juvenile Hobby. In comparison, the nape of juvenile Eleonora's Falcon is entirely dark and merges with the crown. Occasionally, Eleonora's Falcon can show a slightly pale patch on the nape, but this is ill-defined, diffused and less obvious. The absence of this nape patch on the dark Hobbies observed in southern Italy is not surprising, given the overall darkness of the plumage.

we were able to evaluate the dark birds with this in mind, and still confidently eliminate first-summer Eleonora's.

Bill shape and structure are further useful, yet poorly known, features for separating Eleonora's Falcon and Hobby. On the former, the bill appears stronger and more powerful, with a deeper base and slightly more decurved structure than that of Hobby. The bills of the dark Hobbies appeared small, gentle and delicate, and closely matched the bill shape and structure of accompanying, typical Hobbies. The cere and eye-ring of the dark Hobbies were described as yellowish-grey or greenish-yellow, while the legs were pale yellow-ochre – all consistent with the bare-part colours of a typical Hobby. In contrast, on 2nd cy male Eleonora's, these areas appear both brighter and of a purer yellow, especially the legs and eye-ring, though less so on the cere. The cere and eye-ring of females appear grey or even greyish-blue, and so do not match the bare-part colours of the dark Hobbies.

Ristow (2004) considers that face pattern is the most reliable means of separating most juvenile Eleonora's Falcons from most Hobbies. We were surprised by this analysis. In fresh juvenile plumage, Eleonora's Falcon typically shows a rather strong facial colour, tending towards a rich, or even vivid, cream, a colour never shown by Hobby. In contrast, juvenile Hobby frequently shows a yellowish face in fresh juvenile plumage, and in some particularly strongly toned individuals the face can appear decidedly buffish-cream. While the difference in colour tone between Eleonora's Falcon and Hobby is usually clear, we would not consider this to be the most reliable means for their separation.

More importantly, perhaps, is that both juvenile Hobby and Sooty Falcon exhibit a second 'moustache', which appears as a dark 'tooth' extending onto the ear-coverts behind the eye. In most cases, this is much shorter and less obvious in the field than the moustachial stripe. Eleonora's Falcon never shows this second 'moustache' and, if a dark tooth is visible on the rear cheek, it is irregular in shape, being short, poorly marked and, in most cases, joined to the side of the neck or nape. In some birds, it may only be apparent in the hand. This feature is well illustrated in Svensson *et al.* (2000).

In flight, the upperwing of juvenile Eleonora's Falcon shows a contrastingly bold and well-marked dark trailing edge, which is often noticeable at considerable distance. This feature is shared with juvenile Red-footed *F. vespertinus* and Amur Falcons *F. amurensis* (Forsman 1999a,b; Corso 2002), but never with Hobby at any age. Hobby has a wider terminal bar on the remiges, but this is not strikingly darker than the remainder of the wing, never as wide as that shown by Eleonora's Falcon, and is rarely visible in the field. The dark Hobbies in southern Italy did not show any suggestion of a darker trailing edge to the wing.

By widening the debate about these dark Hobbies, we have at least succeeded in raising awareness of these interesting falcons among European birders. As Dietrich Ristow suggests, we intend to continue with our observations, as there is clearly much still to learn.

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Conservation research news

Compiled by Geoff Hilton, Chris Bailey and Lennox Campbell

Extinction risk from climate change

Whenever the topic of climate change crops up, there is an understandable tendency to start thinking in local terms. What will happen to Dotterels *Charadrius morinellus* and Snow Buntings *Plectrophenax nivalis* in the Scottish mountains; when will the next southern warbler start breeding in England? But climate change is global and impinges on the work of all conservationists. Should we alter our priorities now, because of the changes that we suspect climate change will bring? How do we conserve species whose ranges are likely to shift dramatically over the next few decades? Above all, how bad are things likely to get? What does a temperature rise of a few degrees Celsius mean for life on earth?

One of the first attempts to estimate the number of extinctions that will occur because of climate change was published earlier this year (*Nature* 427: 145-148). Although subject to much uncertainty, this paper is a landmark, since it predicted, using scientifically defensible methods, the size of the looming extinction wave. The paper estimated future extinction rates by predicting the range shifts that species will undergo as they track the changing climate. Firstly, the climatic region that a species currently occupies – its 'climate envelope' – was determined. Climate-change models were then used to predict where those conditions will be found in the year 2050 – the species' predicted future range. Next, the 'species-area' relationship was used to predict extinction rates. In general, larger geographic areas hold more species, so if there is an overall tendency towards species occupying smaller ranges as a result of climate change, there will be a net loss of species.

These methods were followed for a set of 1,103 species for which sufficient data were available (these included plants, butterflies and birds, from Amazonia to Europe). The modelling suggested that somewhere in the range of 13-57% of terrestrial species are likely to suffer extinction as a result of climate change.

There are several reasons for the variability in the estimate. First, it is uncertain how well species will be able to shift their range to follow their moving climate envelope. If they can disperse well, they are less vulnerable. This has major implications for conservation. Can we assist the process of range shift – perhaps by increasing the 'connections' between habitat patches? Should conservationists be planning for corridors and stepping-stones between protected sites? Second, the rate of climate change will depend greatly on how rapidly and effectively humans reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

The overall conclusion is that climate change is likely to cause many extinctions over the next 50 years – more even than habitat destruction – but that there are still opportunities to avoid the most catastrophic scenarios, if effective action is taken.

Wild bird cover benefits wintering birds

Recently, a wide range of research findings have begun to influence farming practices, with the aim of helping to reverse declining farmland bird populations. Henderson *et al.* (2004) present the results of winter surveys in 1998/99, 1999/00 and 2000/01 to assess the value of wild bird cover (WBC) to birds. WBC includes a variety of crop species which are planted to provide food and cover for game and other species. An average of 100 plots were surveyed each winter, on a variety of farms throughout the country.

Bird use of WBC varied markedly, depending on the type of crop planted, but overall it proved to be highly attractive to birds throughout the winter period, with overall densities of birds up to 12 times as high as on conventional crops. Significantly higher densities were found on single-species WBC for 14 of the 18 bird species considered when compared with conventional crops.

Kale was one of the best crops for a broad range of birds, and ranked as one of the top three crops for 14 species. Second-year kale was considered especially valuable, with over 15% of all records of Song Thrushes *Turdus philomelos*, 28% of Tree Sparrows *Passer montanus* and 11% of Linnets *Carduelis cannabina*. Quinoa was also important for a number of species, including 10% of Greenfinch *C. chloris*, 26% of Tree Sparrow and 10% of Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus* sightings. Yellowhammers *E. citrinella* and Corn Buntings *E. calandra* were found in high numbers on cereal WBC. By contrast, crops that were relatively poor included buckwheat, phacelia and sunflowers.

Two non-crop-related factors were found to have a significant positive impact on bird density within the crop. These were the weed content of the crop, which provided additional food for birds to feed on; and the presence of wooded boundaries, which attracted higher densities of most birds, presumably because they gave protective cover. The authors suggest that providing a mix of kale, which is left for a second year to seed, quinoa and unharvested cereals would support the largest range of species. It is this model, of at least three seed-bearing crops, which is now being used in the Wild Bird Cover option of the Countryside Stewardship Scheme in England and similar schemes in Wales and Scotland. Other crops could easily be used as either additions or substitutions if they were being tailored for a particular species of conservation concern.

Henderson, I. G., Vickery, J. A., & Carter, N. 2004. The use of winter bird crops by farmland birds in lowland England. *Biol. Conserv.* 118: 21-32.

Do farmland birds do better in Denmark?

It is widely accepted that lowland farmland birds have declined throughout much of north-western Europe, giving rise to concerns that bird populations in eastern Europe will come under similar pressures as further countries join the EU. Tony Fox (2004) has carried out an analysis of data on trends in agricultural activities and farmland birds in Denmark between 1983 and 2001, which suggests that predicting such impacts may be complicated.

Danish agriculture has changed in broadly the same way as that in the UK, although the timing of some changes has differed. For example, the switch from spring to autumn sowing of cereal crops, generally recognised as a key factor in UK bird declines, took place almost a decade later in Denmark. Of 27 species most associated with farmland, however, only five have declined in Denmark since 1983, compared with 15 in the UK; and only two of these, Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* and Yellowhammer, are predominantly farmland species. Species such as Sky Lark *Alauda arvensis*, Tree Sparrow and Linnet, which are the focus of concern in the UK, have remained stable or even increased in Denmark. Fox acknowledged that all these species may have undergone major declines prior to 1983, as was the case in the UK; but even so it is notable that there were no declines during the following period of rapid agricultural intensification, up to 2001.

Fox consider a variety of possible reasons why Danish farmland birds appear to have been less affected than those in the UK. Lack of winter food, thought to be critical for some species in the UK, may be less important for those species, such as Sky Lark and Linnet, which leave Denmark after the breeding season. Others, such as Corn Bunting and Tree Sparrow remain, but are not declining. It is possible that the distribution of non-crop habitats (e.g. field margins, copses) and organic farms (which make up about 6% of the farmed area) may be more effective in buffering the effects of intensification in Denmark. Further research is needed, but these results do suggest that there may be considerable scope for improving conditions for birds within intensively farmed landscapes, while at the same time sustaining agricultural yields.

Fox, A. D. 2004. Has Danish agriculture maintained farmland bird populations? *J. Appl. Ecol.* 41: 427-439.

Letters

Breeding Honey-buzzards in Britain

I write in reply to the letter by Combridge *et al.* (2003), and to agree with their view that the claim by Roberts *et al.* (1999), of 'a real increase' in numbers of breeding Honey-buzzards *Pernis apivorus* in Britain in the last 30 years, has not yet been substantiated.

Since 1954, a small group of observers has monitored Honey-buzzards in the New Forest, Hampshire, and their records (summarised for 1954-92 in Clark & Eyre 1993) show that the number of pairs present in the breeding season has fluctuated. Some allowance for inexperience in monitoring the species during the early years of fieldwork in the 1950s needs to be made, but up to four pairs were present during 1954-60, up to nine pairs during 1961-80 and two or three pairs during 1981-92. The period 1993-2002 saw a recovery to pre-1981 population levels, although in 2003 numbers roughly halved and were then similar to those during 1981-92. It is worth stressing that the above figures include pairs which summered but did not attempt to breed. In my view, it is perfectly reasonable to suggest that the British population as a whole may have been subject to similar fluctuations, though with so many variables affecting Honey-buzzards (e.g. numbers reaching Britain, regional climatic differences in any given year), such variations may not be consistent throughout the country.

Honey-buzzards are long-lived birds (one is known to have reached 28 years 10 months; *BWP*) and individual pairs can be remarkably successful, occupying a site for a dozen seasons or more. It is perhaps surprising that relatively few individuals in a population can be responsible for producing a high proportion of the young reared over a long period, but the disappearance of a pair from a long-occupied site is not necessarily followed immediately by the arrival of new tenants; such sites may remain vacant for many years.

Roberts *et al.* (1999) and Roberts & Lewis (2003) appeared to suggest that Honey-buzzards now breeding in upland conifer plantations had only 'recently' colonised this habitat, presumably during the 1990s. I believe, however, that this is incorrect; to my knowledge, mature conifers in upland Britain have been utilised for breeding since at least the early 1970s.

Finally, I wish to pay tribute to fieldworkers, many personally known to me since the mid 1950s, 'who have *quietly* [my italics] devoted much time and effort to protecting breeding Honey-buzzards in Britain' (Combridge *et al.* 2003). In recent years, so-called 'data suppression' has become subject to much unwarranted and ill-informed criticism. The observers who have monitored this species for some 50 years in the New Forest have always put the welfare and security of their subject first, and have for some time now deposited their results with the Rare Breeding Birds Panel. Moreover, I believe that the fears expressed by Combridge *et al.*, that previously withheld Honey-buzzard data is in danger of being lost, will prove groundless, and that all such data will be deposited with the appropriate body in due course.

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The decline of the Common Swift

I read Phil Palmer's letter (*Brit. Birds* 97: 146) with great interest, as it mirrors the experiences of those of us trying to stem the now-apparent decline of the Common Swift *Apus apus* in the UK. In Scotland, for example, miles of publicly managed tenement dwellings have been refurbished with PVC fascia boarding (Darlaston in prep.), eliminating nest access for Common Swifts and other house-nesting birds. Those responsible for such decisions often appear incredulous or uninterested that housing for disadvantaged communities can and often does contribute to urban biodiversity.

But the situation goes far wider than just PVC fascia boards. As Wotton *et al.* (2002) showed, very few birds nest in post-war buildings, so there is already a 60-year deficit in the creation of new nest-sites. In addition, the re-roofing of older properties, invariably carried out during the summer, destroys nests and chicks, and results in a bird-proof roof, compounding the problem. Finally, unsympathetic renovation of historic buildings, often using public money, may result in every living thing, humans apart, being excluded.

Unless housing associations, developers, builders, architects and government can be rapidly persuaded to take a different view, our urban environment will become ever more sterile, and species dependent on buildings for nest places will vanish from our skies. Contrast this with Zurich, where since 1929 every building has been surveyed by the local authority and its resident birds recorded. Any restoration or repair must take the birds into account and retain their nest places. This service is managed by a four-person local government team and is, I am told, neither expensive nor difficult to run.

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The decline of the House Sparrow

The many articles and letters written about the decline of the House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* in Britain have demonstrated a general acceptance that there are two discrete populations, 'rural' and 'urban'. Rural House Sparrows have declined mainly, it seems, as a result of the shift from spring-sown to autumn-sown cereals. The consequent lack of winter stubbles has, in turn, led to a decrease in winter survival (Crick *et al.* 2002). Urban House Sparrows, on the other hand, are thought to be unaffected by agricultural change, and their decline is thus hailed as a 'mystery'. This conclusion assumes that House Sparrows are extremely sedentary, and that both rural and urban populations are isolated and self-sustaining. There is much to contradict this assumption. In The Netherlands, for example, one study revealed that urban populations in Amsterdam were maintained by immigration from nearby suburban areas (see Perrins 1994), while Summers-Smith (1999) referred to a thesis by Heij (1985), who concluded that the populations in urban and rural areas of Rotterdam were not self-sustaining, but depended on immigration from the suburbs.

There is only one reasonable explanation for the population decline of House Sparrows in towns and cities: that these areas are unable to support a self-sustaining population, and are no longer boosted by immigration from more favourable areas. If this is correct, urban population decline would be most obvious in settlements where the surrounding countryside has undergone sufficient agricultural change to hinder winter survival; these are 'sink' populations for which the 'source' areas no longer exist. It should be possible to establish from existing data whether all urban areas which have experienced a population decline have also seen a significant reduction in winter food availability in their rural surroundings, and this would be a worthwhile exercise.

It is the sedentary and dispersive nature of the House Sparrow that provides the key to its present status, and what we are now seeing is population fragmentation in action. When horses disappeared from our towns, food availability for urban sparrows plummeted, but resources available to those living away from horses and stables remained largely unchanged. In the decades following the replacement of horses with motor-vehicles, several gradual changes would have had locally important effects in towns, including more cars, housing, gardens and cats, sparrow-proof eaves, and landscape 'hardening'. Not all of these changes were detrimental; in some areas, extra housing meant more nest-sites, and gardens brought weed seeds or bird feeders. Nothing made a significant dent in the overall sparrow population until widespread agricultural changes in the late 1970s/early 1980s introduced autumn-sown cereals, together with more efficient harvesting, and sparrow-proof grain storage. Previously thriving populations were decimated, with no overspill for less-favoured neighbouring areas.

It is not all doom and gloom though. Local councils, wildlife groups and others can all make a real difference to House Sparrow populations in urban and suburban areas. The first step is to identify areas which still support House Sparrows, those which contain suitable nest-sites and *year-round* feeding resources. The suitability of adjoining areas may be improved by erecting nestboxes and establishing plants to provide seed and attract insects. The systematic provision of bird food is an alternative, though it is imperative that feeders are cleaned regularly to prevent infection. If the decline of the 'urban' sparrow is to be reversed in the short term then such remedial actions should be implemented with urgency. In the longer term, the real solution is to increase the 'rural' sparrow population via broad-scale agricultural changes which improve the availability of winter food.

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Wintering farmland birds – a Welsh perspective

I am pleased to see a continuing interest by *British Birds* in the importance of changes to farmland habitat for our bird populations, and it was with great interest that I read the recent paper by Gillings & Beaven (2004), which discussed wintering farmland birds. Many of the findings of the survey are very instructive but, as an observer living in one of those areas which received lesser coverage (i.e. inland south to mid Wales), there are two points that I should like to draw attention to.

First, in Beconshire (and also in neighbouring Herefordshire), Fieldfares *Turdus pilaris* are often found feeding on fallen apples in old orchards in the period leading up to the New Year. Thereafter, they are most commonly found in old grazed grassland. In mid Wales, however, I have noticed a long-term decline in the numbers of Fieldfares feeding in grassland since the late 1970s, regardless of winter weather conditions. I relate this to the large-scale ploughing and reseeding of old grassland to support greatly increased numbers of sheep, which have more than doubled during this period. In this area, there is little evidence that Fieldfares are attracted to tightly cropped grass swards, and the age of pasture appears to be more important. It is also possible that areas of mixed farming, which are more prevalent in England, are more attractive to Fieldfares than sheep monoculture, which would help to explain the distribution shown in fig. 3 of the paper.

Second, it was interesting to note the strong association of Tree Sparrows *Passer montanus* with linseed. In Breconshire, the main winter habitat of this species over the past 25 years has been unsprayed root fields (especially swedes) with plenty of weed seeds. The disappearance of such fields in recent years appears to be the single most important reason for the decline of this species locally. I have recorded the extinction of several Tree Sparrow colonies within just 1-3 years at sites where farmers have switched to spraying the root fields or simply not planting them for one or two years. Furthermore, there has been no corresponding increase in other colonies in the area, where the practice of growing unsprayed winter roots has continued, nor has there been any movement into other adjacent areas of mixed farmland. Overall, therefore, the Breconshire Tree Sparrow population has slumped from perhaps 250 pairs in 1996 to fewer than 50 pairs in 2004, with the greatest decline during the foot-and-mouth disease outbreak of 2001, when very few root fields were planted locally.

Reference

Gillings, S., & Beaven, P. 2004. Wintering farmland birds: results from mass-participation surveys. *Brit. Birds* 97: 118-129.

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Reviews

THE SKYLARK

By Paul F. Donald. T & A D Poyser, A&C Black, London, 2004. 256 pages; maps; tables; figures; line-drawings; black-and-white and colour photographs. ISBN 0-7136-6568-8. Hardback, £35.00.

Paul Donald clearly has a penchant for visually undistinguished, small brown birds, as much of his research time in recent years has been taken up with Sky Larks *Alauda arvensis* and Corn Buntings *Emberiza calandra*. It is a liking I share; these are so often intriguing species. This monograph of the Sky Lark is based largely on research carried out on English farmland during the RSPB's Skylark Research Project of 1995-99, in which the author had a leading role.

The book follows the well-established format of such monographs, with chapters covering the larks as a group (their species, evolution and ecology), the distribution and racial variation of Sky Larks, populations and habitats, and song and song flight. Four chapters are devoted to the breeding cycle, while others examine winter distribution and behaviour, migration, survival and mortality, the impact of modern agriculture, and, finally, the Sky Lark in literature and its historical persecution.

I found much of fascinating interest in this book, and much that was new to me. Larks are a diverse group, and Donald makes the point that they have adapted to some of the most hostile environments in the world. They also include some of the most abundant bird species (still), one of the rarest (Raso Island Lark *A. razae*), and one of the most bizarre (the Flappet Lark *Mirafra rufocinnamomea*, which sounds like the figment of some fictional mad scientist's imagination). In particular, I found the discussion of the Sky Lark's song and song flight of absorbing interest. Sky Lark song is something that one tends to take for granted, but it is clearly of considerable complexity, and the song flight is as important as the song. And the idea that Sky Larks being chased by Merlins *Falco columbarius* can defend themselves by singing as they flee, to show that they are going to be difficult to catch and not worth pursuing – a sort of 'yah boo, you can't catch me' tactic – is a delightful observation.

The account of the breeding cycle is excellent. As with many ground-nesting birds, productivity per nest is low because of high rates of nest predation. Sky Larks compensate for this with multiple nesting attempts. Donald shows convincingly that the decreasing frequency of nest attempts brought about by changes in farmland habitats is an important cause of the species' present population decline. He discusses the impact of predation fully and, rightly in my view, discards it as a cause of population decline, despite the increase in potential predators in recent years. Whether this will persuade those with a vested interest in finding causes other than land management responsible is another matter. Much the same comment arises with efforts to reduce the scale of persecution that still exists in Europe (why is it always the French, Italians and Greeks?). The author also gives a detailed account of persecution in the nineteenth century, with some nice illustrations, at least one of which happily looks as dangerous to the shooting party as the larks. Throughout this chapter the author makes excellent use of apposite quotations.

It is when the author moves on to discuss Sky Larks and modern agriculture that I find the book less satisfactory. It suffers here from the drawback of its genesis. It is primarily a study of Sky Larks in modern cereals, but while cereals are an extremely important habitat for Sky Larks, his own figures (in tables 3.1 and 3.2) show that there are, in fact, as many in grassland; and that natural grasslands and moorland, extensive habitats in the British uplands, hold some of the highest densities of all, a point which the author repeats for upland grasslands in the text. The June Census of Agriculture statistics show that these habitats, categorised as rough grazings in sole right and common, occupy about a third of all British agricultural land (c. 5.35 million ha). Accepting the densities given for rough grazing by Browne *et al.* (2000) indicates that there are probably some 300,000 pairs of Sky Larks in this habitat, which appears to have been omitted from the results of that survey in Scotland. What is not clear from this book, therefore, is whether cereal populations truly hold the key to the species' conservation because they are the sole drivers of population change. I am not saying that this is not so, only that it appears to me not to be demonstrated here.

This may be regarded as an unfair criticism in the sense that detailed studies of Sky Larks in these habitats are probably not yet available. But in Britain at least, such upland grassland has altered considerably in recent years with changes in grazing patterns, and may change far more with proposed changes to subsidy regimes in the EU, a factor also likely to affect extensive grasslands in eastern Europe. A more rounded discussion and assessment of the conservation of this species seems to me to be needed, which gives proper weight to the importance of grassland populations. In summary, this is an excellent and interesting study, but it is not yet a definitive monograph.

Browne, S. J., Vickery, J. A., & Chamberlain, D. E. 2000. Densities and population estimates of breeding Skylarks (*Alauda arvensis*) in Britain in 1997. *Bird Study* 47: 52-65.

Michael Shrubb

THE BIRDS OF AFRICA. VOL. VII. SPARROWS TO BUNTINGS.

Edited by C. Hilary Fry and
Stuart Keith. Illustrations by
Martin Woodcock, Ian Willis
and C. Hilary Fry. Christopher
Helm, A&C Black, London,
2004. 688 pages; 36 colour
plates; distribution maps, line-
drawings. ISBN 0-7136-6531-9.
Hardback, £135.00.

In July 1981, my mother arrived in Dar es Salaam with the first volume of *Birds of Africa* in her hand luggage. Until then, we had relied on our much-thumbed MPG (Mackworth-Praed & Grant, *Birds of Eastern and North Eastern Africa*), published in 1952 and heavily dependent on pre-war information. There was some disappointment with Vol. I, as the information on many species appeared thin and it was weak in critical areas, especially compared with the knowledge then available in Europe. The plates were not up to the standards we had begun to expect and the maps showed vast swathes of solid colour, whereas the reality was, at least, a series of question marks. Succeeding volumes improved greatly in overall quality, and with Vol. VII have come as close to *BWP* as we can probably hope for. At least now we really do know where the knowledge gaps are.

Six family accounts, 63 genera and 309 species are covered in this final volume, and now the maps resemble those in *BWP*, with many fragmented populations and some well-defined ecological limits shown. Vol. VI began with an interesting discussion on speciation and ecological limits using a bush shrike (Malaconotidae) as an example, whereas Vol. VII uses the grey-headed sparrow complex in its opening statements on systematics and taxonomy. I am pleased that it shows just how complicated the situation is in Tanzania, and even more happy with the question marks on the map of the Northern Grey-headed Sparrow *Passer griseus* on page 3. Far better than the large red blobs of two decades ago.

In many ways, this treatment of the common and widespread sparrow of human habitation highlights significant knowledge gaps, based on low-level specimen collection and the lumping that occurred in the 1960s. Since then, we have not looked closely at this group and clearly it is time to do so. While we 'know' that *Passer griseus* is the 'town and village' sparrow throughout much of central and northern Tanzania, we do not know the limits of the forms *gongonensis* or *suahelicus*, while the map for Southern Grey-headed Sparrow *P. diffusus* is surely wrong, in that on the mainland it does not occur as far north as Dar es Salaam and may not even reach the south bank of the Rufiji (at least I think it doesn't!).

Books of this quality can never be as up to date as those of us in the field would like them to be. There will always be 'time it takes to get into print' gaps, and Vol. VII suffers somewhat from the time lag caused by the sale of the Academic Press imprint to Elsevier and then to A&C Black. From a biogeographical aspect, I see that the text for White-browed Sparrow Weaver *Plocepasser mahali* does not include Tanzania in the species' range, yet it was known to occur there in the early 1990s and is shown accurately on the map. A clear case of the finished text being somewhat older than the maps.

Twelve authors are credited with the species accounts and we must all thank Bob Payne for his lifetime commitment to the Indigobirds *Vidua*. The illustrations of mouth markings will greatly assist those of us lucky enough to handle these birds. Martin Woodcock has been a close friend since his first visits to Tanzania in the early 1980s, when we provided him with live birds in the hand for his work on the passerine volumes. He will be the first to admit how difficult this seven-volume work has been for a single illustrator, and his improvement since the early volumes is evident in the quality of his illustrations in the last three. Sadly, some plates look flat and rather dull, yet I know the originals are far better. It is a great shame that the quality of the plates in early issues of the *Ibis* in the late 1880s are not matched by printing techniques 120 years later; this is presumably a reflection of the need to keep the production costs down. Even so, at £135.00 this volume is not cheap, and is certainly well beyond the reach of the many African students and enthusiasts who would benefit most from it. With only 5,000 copies printed, one can only hope that many universities in Africa will have a copy, but I doubt that most will and some countries may not have a single copy in public hands.

We owe a tremendous debt to Andy Richford at Academic Press for making this series happen, and similarly to the long-term senior editors Hilary Fry, Stuart Keith and Emil Urban, as well as the numerous authors of species accounts and special sections. This will probably be the last such work following the Biological Species Concept, and it seems likely that any new work on African birds on a similar scale will need to wait for more publications on taxonomy and systematics, and will follow the Phylogenetic Species Concept. A compact, two-volume set would perhaps meet the demand for new editions of the early volumes and provide a concise taxonomic statement to take us into the next decade. In summary, I look forward to having this superb book with me in the field during the coming months when its full value will be very much appreciated.

Neil Baker

WHERE TO WATCH BIRDS IN SOMERSET, GLOUCESTERSHIRE AND WILTSHIRE

By Ken Hall and John Govett.
Christopher Helm, A&C Black,
London, 2004. 300 pages;
maps; line-drawings.
ISBN 0-7136-6614-5.
Paperback, 14.99.

The authorship of the third edition of this useful work is unchanged, but the title recognises the disappearance of Avon as a county, although it survives as a bird-recording area. The authors of this series have had a more difficult and delicate task than a casual reader might suppose. Ken Hall and John Govett admit that they originally had misgivings about the whole concept of a county site-guide, because it might increase pressure on 'already beleaguered populations', but they are surely right in maintaining that there are far greater dangers to the birds of the southwest from housing developers, road-makers and car importers. A glance from the Avon Bridge is devastating proof of this. It is probably better to show the public what needs to be protected than to keep them away from hidden mysteries; yet some rarities must be guarded by a degree of vagueness, and a few must remain veiled. Thus, one cannot omit all mention of Exmoor Merlins *Falco columbarius* and Ring Ouzels *Turdus torquatus*, but one should not lead the visitor to actual nesting sites or mention breeding harriers *Circus* or Spotted Crakes *Porzana porzana.*

This remains an excellent guide, carefully updated. It is easy for a dedicated patch-worker to find omissions, and even minor errors, but these readers have already passed beyond the stage of needing such a book. Site-guides are meant to lead birdwatchers to places, to inform them where they can, or must not, park or walk, and to give them some idea of what they might find at different times of the year. For the experienced observer, the 'Access' sections, with their maps, will in practice be the most important part of the book. Perhaps most useful is the coverage of sites away from places like National Parks and actual reserves (where the new-style *Birdwatcher's Yearbook* may be all that is needed). The area covered is large; Wiltshire alone was the second-largest of the old inland counties. In certain places the guidance seems particularly helpful: the Blackdown Hills, with their complicated mosaic of public and private land, much of it on steep gradients; both sides of the Upper Severn Estuary, which have a number of sites that the casual visitor might have difficulty in reaching; the military training areas of Salisbury Plain, where it is only too easy to see very little without careful preparation; the Forest of Dean; the park-lakes of Wiltshire; and the amazing and still-developing Cotswold Water Park. It might have been good to have included the whole of Exmoor National Park, however, part of which lies in neighbouring Devon.

The drawings by John Govett are pleasant and relevant. The layout is clear, but the spacing is a little tight, no doubt for the sake of economy; the lack of a space after a full stop is bound to give a crowded appearance to a text that is packed with information.

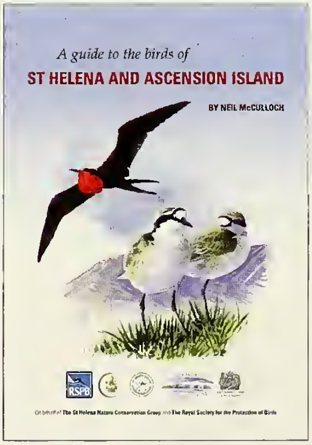
David Ballance

A GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF ST HELENA AND ASCENSION ISLAND

By Neil McCulloch. RSPB,
Sandy, 2004. 92 pages; maps;
numerous colour illustrations.
ISBN 1-901930-46-7.
Paperback, £10.00.

I picked up this little guide with keen anticipation, but was ultimately somewhat disappointed. It is undoubtedly aimed at those with a casual interest in birds, but since no other guide to these South Atlantic islands exists, any birders planning to visit one or both of them will be tempted to buy it. After all, each of them boasts an endemic, Ascension Frigatebird *Fregata aquila* (Ascension) and St Helena Plover *Charadrius sanctaehelenae* (St Helena).

The introduction describes the geological origins, historical perspectives and habitat zones of each island, and relates these to bird life. There is also a section on where to watch birds. The simplified maps are barely adequate and for Ascension several good birdwatching areas are omitted: North Point, Portland Point (in the southeast), and the walk to Hummock Point from North East Bay – all good for seabirds, and all can be reached by road. Casual mention of walks to Weather Post, Powers Peak and Letter Box, to view Boatswainbird Islet, should have contained warnings of how long and rugged these walks are – usually involving most of a day, and requiring suitable footwear and plenty of water.


A guide to the birds of
ST HELENA AND ASCENSION ISLAND
BY NEIL McCULLOCH
RSPB
On behalf of The St Helena Nature Conservation Group and The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

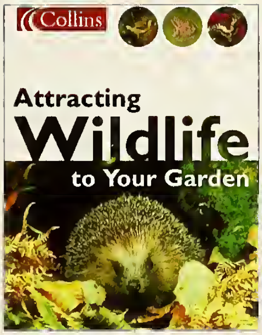
The main chapter contains details of the 26 species likely to be seen (23 on St Helena and 18 on Ascension), split into seabirds and landbirds. Each species is illustrated with a watercolour sketch by Dan Powell (who also provides others elsewhere in the text). I was a little surprised by the list: why no mention of Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*, Common Swift *Apus apus* or hirundines? They are relegated to an appendix of accidental visitors (making totals of just over 60 species for each island), whereas Bulwer's Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii* is not – yet this is a species unlikely to be identified by a casual visitor. There are several other points, of which I must mention that a wholly brown form adult Red-footed Booby *Sula sula* is illustrated, but captioned as the white-headed brown form; and the white-bellied form of the Ascension Frigatebird occurs in both sexes, not just female.

Despite its shortcomings, there is helpful information here for anyone making a visit to one or both of these fascinating islands.

Robin Prytherch

ATTRACTING WILDLIFE TO YOUR GARDEN

By Michael Chinery.
HarperCollins, London, 2004.
128 pages; photographs and diagrams.
ISBN 0-00-715456-9.
Hardback, £14.99.



Gardens cover almost a million hectares of the UK and can so provide valuable wildlife refuges. This book covers all aspects of their wildlife and has major sections on garden habitat, mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians, and insects and other invertebrates. An information section includes details of relevant organisations and suppliers (including one for 'biological control agents'), useful websites and a bibliography. It is written in a clear, simple style with text boxes containing useful tips scattered throughout. Although lavishly illustrated with generally high-quality photographs (though one of a Coal Tit *Parus ater* appears no fewer than three times), a few of the images are disappointing. For example, a poorly focused Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis* is used twice, once with the image reversed so that it looks different; and a Siskin *Carduelis spinus* is labelled as a European Serin *Serinus serinus*, thus giving the potential for a run of misidentifications on feeders this coming winter.

Garden habitat is best improved for wildlife by variety, non-harmful pest control, hedges rather than fences and, where possible, a garden pond. Ponds are covered in detail, with a step-by-step construction guide, although the examples (in common with many in the book) would better suit a National Trust property than a suburban 'semi' or urban terraced house. Sections on moth traps and various types of nestbox will be of interest to younger readers (look out for the box apparently occupied by both Little Owl *Athene noctua* and Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*), as will diagrams showing the life-cycle of a Common Frog *Rana temporaria* and a (cat-free) garden food web.

One is left feeling unsure whether this book is intended for a coffee table, as a DIY handbook, or as a garden wildlife identification guide (including some southern European species). Covering such a wide scope it is necessarily at a basic level, for example 'tree creepers may be confused with sparrows but they are readily distinguished by their curved beak and white underside', while 'one is unlikely to want such power [×100 zoom binoculars] in the garden'! Although attractive and giving an overview of the subject, it is likely to leave many readers wanting more.

Richard & Megan Fairbank

ATTRACTING WILDLIFE TO YOUR GARDEN

By John A. Burton and David Tipling. New Holland, London, 2004.
160 pages; many photographs. ISBN 1-84330-482-1. Hardback, £16.99.

We have always been a nation of gardeners, but one of the biggest changes in recent years is the growth in the amount of money we spend on improving our gardens for wildlife. Every weekend, thousands of us flock to garden centres, and prominent among our purchases is bird food, including various types of fat ball, seeds, cakes and mealworms. The range of other accessories is huge – including bat boxes, hedgehog houses and bushes for butterflies. So it is perhaps not surprising that our gardens attract a wide range of wildlife.

The majority of this book is a directory of wildlife species, with 90 pages devoted to describing the commoner mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and insects that can be seen in gardens. The choice of birds runs to 66 species, which includes the obvious garden regulars plus a few surprises. Although few of us will ever see them, I can just about understand the reasons for including Red Kite *Milvus milvus*, Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca* and Crested Tit *Parus cristatus*, but I am struggling with the inclusion of White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*! Also, I cannot imagine that many of us will ever see a Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* or Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* in our gardens. Meanwhile, I am surprised by the absence of Rook *Corvus frugilegus* – a frequent visitor to country gardens, plus Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*, Willow Tit *Parus montanus*, Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* and Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus.* Brief notes are given on identification, breeding and favoured foods.

Supporting chapters describe things you can do to attract a greater variety of wildlife. Suggestions are given for the best trees and shrubs, varieties of food, nestboxes and bird feeders. Incidentally, these include erecting a cartwheel for – you've guessed it – your local White Storks. Interesting chapters cover ideas for creating a wildflower meadow or woodland glade, and the author gets full marks from me for not dodging the tricky issue of the eight million cats that kill an estimated 500 million birds in the UK each year!

This is a pleasant book with good illustrations that will be appreciated by birders who are also garden enthusiasts.

Keith Betton

FIELD GUIDE TO THE DRAGONFLIES AND DAMSELFLIES OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

By Steve Brooks, illustrated by Richard Lewington. British Wildlife Publishing, Rotherwick, 2004. 160 pages; colour illustrations.
ISBN 0-9531399-0-5.
Paperback, £18.95.

This revised edition makes an excellent book even better. It provides a comprehensive guide to all the species of Odonata that have been recorded in Britain & Ireland. This comprises 39 resident species, three extinct species and 13 migrants. The inclusion of Southern Emerald Damselfly *Lestes barbarus*, Willow Emerald Damselfly *Chalcolestes viridis*, Small Red-eyed Damselfly *Erythromma viridulum* and Common Green Darner *Anax junius* brings the species list right up to date. The text has been written by a team of experts and is informative while remaining highly readable. The book is light and compact, making this a field guide which *can* be taken into the field!

The species accounts, which comprise the majority of the book, are packed full of information. Each account is clearly laid out, with sections describing identification, status, conservation, ecology and behaviour. A distribution map and diagrammatic presentation of the flight period are provided for each species. What most impresses, however, is the wonderful artwork of Richard Lewington, although this will come as no surprise to readers who have encountered his work before. Illustrations are provided for every species and, in most cases, both sexes and details of important identification features are illustrated.

This is more than just a field guide. There are instructive and generously illustrated sections on the life history, habitats and best sites for watching dragonflies. Browsing through the site descriptions I was pleased to note that many of my favourite places in southern England and Cumbria were included.

This is a superb book and everyone involved with its production is to be congratulated. In terms of the Odonata, this is *the* book to own and take into the field. I have no hesitation in recommending it to committed enthusiasts and those just starting to take an interest in this fascinating group of insects.

Simon Stirrup

THE DRAGONFLIES OF EUROPE

By R. R. Askew. Harley Books, Colchester, 2004. 308 pages; 30 colour plates; two pages of colour photographs; numerous line-drawings; maps.
ISBN 0-946589-75-5.
Paperback, £30.00.

This classic book, which first appeared in 1988, is now reissued in a smaller and updated softback edition. The high praise from the original reviews is testament to the book's authority, but the sparing use of English names is just one indication that it is aimed primarily at entomologists, not general naturalists.

As well as the introductory chapters, there are keys to families and larvae, but most of the text is devoted to the species accounts. Revisions are contained in a nine-page supplement and are not incorporated into the original text. There are also updated references. Most of the additional data concern distribution, including details of species newly recognised in Europe. These include *Somatochlora borisi* from the southern Balkans, first described to science as recently as 2001 and illustrated on the cover. Although there are many black-and-white diagrams in the text to assist identification, the 30 colour plates (one newly painted for this edition) are grouped together at the back.

Beginners will no doubt prefer to start with some of the more attractive and accessible recent guides to the British fauna. This book is, however, the only English text in print to cover the surprisingly manageable total of 125 breeding species in Europe.

Mike Pennington

News and comment

Compiled by Adrian Pitches

Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of *British Birds*

Shetland's seabird meltdown

Arctic Terns *Sterna paradisaea* desperately hawking moths in the evening sunlight, gangs of Great Skuas *Stercorarius skua* lined up along the roads waiting for the next rabbit to be squashed, and Common Guillemots *Uria aalge* presenting seaweed to their mates instead of display fish. Such observations have been commonplace in Shetland in 2004, and presage yet another poor breeding season for many breeding seabirds, at least those which depend, or used to depend, on Lesser Sandeels *Ammodytes marinus* for attaining breeding condition, sustaining incubation, and feeding chicks through to fledging.

For species such as Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*, Common Guillemot and Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*, laying was extremely late, with widespread evidence of non-breeding among many species. At the time of writing (12th July), different organisations are still monitoring breeding numbers and success throughout the islands, so detailed results are not yet available. For those familiar with these Shetland 'failures', it is no surprise that Arctic Terns and Arctic Skuas *S. parasiticus* have done particularly badly, but this year even the normally bullet-proof Great Skuas are suffering. All the signs are that *no* Great Skuas will fledge on Fair Isle, where the sight of Bonxies on the cliffs, literally pulling adult Common Guillemots off their breeding ledges, pursuing them into the sea and then dismembering them, has not been one to gladden the heart of visitors to the observatory. The news is similarly grim from Foula, which holds by far the largest Great Skua colony in the UK, where Prof. Bob Furness from Glasgow University reported ringing just *two* chicks during his recent annual visit – this from a colony which should number around 2,300 pairs. Perhaps the biggest shock of all, however, is the effect of food shortage on Common Guillemots. At study plots at Sumburgh Head and on Fair Isle, birds were mostly absent from the cliffs throughout April, there was extensive egg loss during June, and a rapid loss of surviving chicks in the first days of July on Fair Isle, where *none* are expected to fledge. On 4th July, the Shetland Ringing Group (including your Editor) made their annual visit to the large Common Guillemot colony in a boulder slope at Compass Head. They were astounded to find not a single guillemot at a colony where, in a good year, they might have expected to ring up to 1,000 chicks.

There is a distinct patchiness to breeding fortunes within the islands: 90% failure (so far) of Kittiwakes on Fair Isle but only 20% at some monitored colonies farther north. At Burravoe, on Yell, Common Guillemot numbers actually increased (by 10%) since 2003, while at Eshaness, in the west Mainland, they decreased by 48%, with a massive variation in colony attendance (238 on 5th June, 62 on 12th June) suggesting either extensive non-breeding or rapid egg loss. These few crumbs of comfort cannot, however, detract from the inevitable consequences of the 2003 and 2004 breeding seasons: a lack of recruitment to breeding populations in the next few years, and possibly reduced adult survival because of the stress of attempting to breed in such impoverished conditions.

If climate change, increases in sea temperatures, and shifts in plankton distribution and abundance are the main causes of these dramatic changes in the fortunes of seabirds, which seems likely, there is little we can do about such losses in the short term except monitor the situation. Ironically, measures to conserve commercial fish stocks may now be adding further pressure on scavenging species by reducing an alternative food supply of discards and offal. There is little detailed monitoring of *Larus* gull species in Shetland but it is notable that several of the larger Great Black-backed Gull *L. marinus* colonies are virtually deserted this year.

(contributed by Martin Heubeck and Deryk Shaw)

Capercaillie population doubles

It was tipped for extinction within 15 years, but the Capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus* has delighted conservationists in Scotland by doubling its population in the past five years. 'Capers' have been declining since the 1970s, from a high point of 20,000 birds to just 1,000 in 1999. Collisions with deer fences and high chick mortality in cold, wet springs have been blamed for the plummeting numbers. But the latest survey by RSPB Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Forestry Commission has found an estimated population of 2,000 birds. Removal of deer fencing in Highland forests, predator control and better weather during the breeding season may all have contributed to the population rise. Most of the Capers were found in Strathspey. Kenny Kortland, Capercaillie Project Officer for RSPB Scotland, commented: 'The population is still comparatively small and needs to be increased further to ensure its future viability. We are currently working on long-term management plans with numerous foresters, so the outlook is bright.' Capercaillies in Scotland are the subject of a £5-million EU-funded action plan aimed at reversing their population decline.

Ospreys for export

It is 50 years since Ospreys *Pandion haliaetus* recolonised the UK, and there are now nearly 200 pairs breeding in Scotland, England – and Wales (see below). Between 1996 and 2001, a total of 64 young birds from the Scottish population were translocated to Rutland Water, where migrants returning from Africa first bred in 2001. Two pairs bred in 2003 and this year one pair is rearing two chicks. Hot on the heels of this success story, five nestling Ospreys from Scotland are now being translocated even further afield, to the Coto Doñana, in southern Spain. A further 15 birds will be sent to Spain during the next three years. They will join young Ospreys from Finland, Germany and Sweden in a co-ordinated effort by Spanish conservationists to restore breeding Ospreys to mainland Spain, where the last pair bred near Malaga in 1982. Prof. Colin Galbraith, Director of Science at Scottish Natural Heritage, said: 'We have considered the merits of this scheme very carefully. It forms part of a wider programme to help Ospreys in Spain, including attempts to eliminate deliberate killing of birds of prey. By working with the Spanish authorities, we hope to help the Osprey recolonise its traditional range across the Mediterranean region.'

Back in the UK, the first pair of Ospreys to recolonise Wales has nested between Porthmadog and Beddgelert. Sadly, the two chicks died when the nest collapsed in gale-force winds, but the adults are still in the area and the RSPB has opened a watchpoint at Pont Croesor. Intriguingly, it is suspected that the adult male in Wales is one of the Rutland Water birds translocated from Scotland in 1998.

Talking of Rutland Water, there is a series of talks about Ospreys in England, Scotland and France on the Sunday of the Birdfair (22nd August); speakers include Roy Dennis and Pete Barron from the Lake District Osprey Project.

Link: Rutland Water Ospreys (www.ospreys.org.uk).

Montys join the raptorfest

Among several species of breeding raptor shown off to the public this summer has been the first-ever widely publicised nest of Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*, Britain's rarest breeding bird of prey. This particular pair is nesting on saltmarsh near Boston in Lincolnshire. The RSPB viewpoint is at College Farm, Frampton Marsh; to help you negotiate your way through the desolate fenland landscape, a grid reference may be handy – TF 357 365. The watchpoint, access for which is through College Farm, will be staffed until 15th August, and open daily.

The harriers join Ospreys, Honey-buzzards *Pernis apivorus* and Peregrine Falcons *Falco peregrinus* as star turns for public wildlife-consciousness-raising events in 2004. A pair of Peregrines nested on Chichester Cathedral in West Sussex this year (with telescopes available in the genteel surroundings of the cathedral tea garden), while the first pair in central London was much admired just off Baker Street.

Kevin Carlsson

262. Female Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*.

Northern Kites take to the wing

The first young birds in the latest phase of the Red Kite *Milvus milvus* reintroduction scheme were released on 12th July this year in the Derwent valley of Gateshead, Tyne & Wear. It is hoped that 20 birds taken from the booming Chilterns population will be on the wing over Tyneside this summer. In addition, a further ten birds were taken north to boost the Dumfries & Galloway reintroduction project.

'Northern Kites' has received substantial financial assistance from the Heritage Lottery Fund (£303,500), Gateshead Council (£250,000) and now the SITA Environmental Trust, which has provided £150,000 of landfill tax credits, for each of the first two years, to fund the project's education and community outreach work. Local schools have been invited to adopt a kite, with the hope that local children will become protective of 'their' birds, follow their life histories with keen interest and share their awareness of the birds with their families.

Farther south, the Yorkshire Red Kite Project has had another successful breeding season with 17 pairs of kites rearing 41 young (16 pairs reared 32 young last year). In Wales, the extraordinary resurgence of the Red Kite continues also – without the aid of reintroductions. From just a handful of pairs in the 1970s, the population has soared to around 400 pairs in 2004. Not only that, they are crossing the border as well; the first record of breeding native Red Kite in England since before 1880 has been reported in Herefordshire, where a single chick has been raised by indigenous Welsh birds.

Golden Plover ticked off

As the 'Glorious Twelfth' looms – and grouse-moor managers start preparing their excuses should there be a poor bag of Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus* – it seems that a disease reducing grouse numbers may be affecting moorland waders too. New research by the Game Conservancy Trust (GCT) suggests that European Golden Plovers *Pluvialis apricaria* may be suffering from the impact of an increasing tick population and the pathogens they transmit. In humans, ticks carrying harmful protozoa can cause a debilitating illness called Lyme disease. Among wildlife, the tick can transmit louping ill, which is a disease found mainly in sheep, although other domestic animals can also be affected.

The GCT has been studying the impact of sheep ticks and louping ill on Red Grouse in Scotland for 20 years, and has revealed that this serious viral disease can kill up to 80% of infected chicks. Results also show that ticks are on the increase in Scotland, owing to the growth in numbers of host species such as Red Deer *Cervus eldii*, and perhaps as a result of warmer winters. In 1985, just 4% of grouse chicks examined by researchers had ticks, but by 2003 that figure had risen to 92%. This summer, a study in the North York Moors National Park is investigating the impact of ticks on breeding waders such as European Golden Plover, Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* and Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquatus*. GCT's Dave Newborn, who is leading this preliminary study, said: 'We've been radio-tracking the waders to measure the extent of the problem, and have found wader chicks as young as three weeks old with heavy tick burdens. Through blood sampling, we hope to identify whether they have become infected with the louping ill virus. As the North York Moors is an important breeding area for waders, any potential reduction in their breeding success needs to be investigated.'

Ebro Delta still under threat

The new Spanish government has confirmed that the controversial water transfer plan, which would have diverted much of the Rio Ebro, in northeast Spain, to the parched south of the country, has been scrapped (*Brit. Birds* 97: 108, 310). This is, however, only a partial reprieve for the bird-rich wetlands of the Ebro Delta, as the flow of sediment-rich water which sustains the delta could still be disrupted by a series of dams upriver. The previous government had proposed to divert 100 billion litres of water per year to the intensive agriculture and tourist developments of southern Spain. Instead, new Environment Minister Cristina Narbona says that 15 desalination plants would provide the same amount of water as the pipeline, but sooner and more cheaply. But although the water transfer has been halted, the overall basin plan – with dams and irrigation projects proposed for the middle basin in Aragon – still threatens the delta.

RSPB opposes Teesmouth windfarm

The RSPB has formally objected to plans for an offshore windfarm between the mouth of the River Tees and Redcar. EDF Energy are proposing a 30-turbine windfarm off the Tees, which local birders say would pose a significant threat both to seabirds on passage and incoming passerine migrants. The RSPB considers the firm's Environmental Statement to be inadequate. The detailed text of its objections is available on the RSPB website at www.rspb.org.uk/england/north/policy

RSPB's Anna Moody said: 'The location of the proposed windfarm lies close to sites that have been given some of the highest levels of international protection because of their importance for wildlife. We believe that any case for a windfarm in this area must prove that there will be no negative impact on important birds and wildlife habitats. Based on the information that we have seen so far, we are not convinced that this is the case.' Exhaustive work by the Teesmouth Bird Club to transcribe seawatchers' records stretching back 40 years has underlined the importance of this stretch of coastline for migrants. Although criticised in some quarters for its evenhanded approach to windfarm applications, the RSPB has, in fact, objected to 27 windfarm proposals (on- and offshore) between 1998-2003 and raised concerns about a further 29.

BB at the Birdfair

This year's British Birdwatching Fair at Rutland Water – the 16th – is raising funds for the dry forests of northern Peru, a region often overlooked in the scramble to conserve the Amazonian rainforest on the other side of the Andes. The dry forest is home to birds like the extravagantly named hummingbird Marvellous Spatuletail *Loddigesia mirabilis*, arguably the most spectacular of the world's 328 species of hummer.

No less spectacular will be the *BB* stand in Marquee 3 at the Birdfair. So please come and say hello, buy those missing back-numbers of *BB*, a new supply of binders or renew your subscription on stands 23 & 24 in Marquee 3. See you there!

New marine wildlife website

Russell Wynn, co-author of last month's fascinating paper on seabirds and oceanic upwelling (*Brit. Birds* 97: 323-335), has launched a new website for marine wildlife enthusiasts, which catalogues the voyages of the Southampton Oceanography Centre research vessels.

Link: SOC (www.soc.soton.ac.uk/marine_wildlife).

Older ornithological society

Further to the discussion about the UK's oldest bird clubs (*Brit. Birds* 97: 366), David Hawkins, Secretary of the Oxford Ornithological Society (OOS), has contacted me with a clarification: '[The] OOS does indeed proudly claim to be the oldest of the county bird clubs, and is a thriving society today. However, its antecedents go back long before 1921. Its founding marked a splitting off of the ornithological section of the much older Ashmolean Natural History Society, which itself claims to be the oldest natural history society in England: it was founded as the Ashmolean Society in 1828 (even older then than the Natural History Society of Northumbria), and was merged with the Oxford Natural History Society in 1901. The OOS maintains close links with the Ashmolean Natural History Society, and the two societies jointly organise the annual Bernard Tucker Memorial Lecture every November.'

As David has pointed out, the Ashmolean NHS was founded one year before the NHS of Northumbria. The latter society's inaugural meeting in 1829 was marked by the first formal description of Bewick's Swan *Cygnus columbianus bewickii.* It was named after the celebrated Northumbrian engraver Thomas Bewick, who had died the previous year. Fittingly, the NHS of Northumbria's 175th anniversary lecture on 20th October 2004 is 'The Bewick's Swan' by Dr Eileen Rees of the WWT. News of this year's Bernard Tucker lecture will be available shortly in N&c.

Rarities Committee submissions – a reminder

Anyone wishing to submit descriptions of rarities to the BBRC by e-mail should send their account(s) to secretary@bbrc.org.uk

Cinnamon Teal adds spice

The male Cinnamon Teal *Anas cyanoptera* on Lewis, Western Isles, in May (*Brit. Birds* 97: plate 218) provoked much interest from the eternal optimists among the listing community, but the duck will have to join a long line of wildfowl (Falcated Duck *A. falcata*, Marbled Duck *Marmaronetta angustirostris*, Hooded Merganser *Lophodytes cucullatus*, etc.) queuing for admission to the British List. Research by the BTO suggests, however, that a wild Cinnamon Teal was caught and ringed in Britain some 25 years ago…

Dawn Balmer reports that the only Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors* to be ringed in Britain was ringed (as a male, of unknown age) at Abbotsbury on 23rd October 1979. She explains: 'This bird was then shot at Hautebut, Somme, France, on 22nd February 1981 as an adult male *Cinnamon Teal.* The bird was originally accepted by BBRC as a Blue-winged Teal. The BBRC Report for 1982 (*Brit. Birds* 76: 486) states that it was ringed as an immature female (not male, as the Dorset Bird Report states) and later identified as a male Cinnamon Teal! The BBRC Report goes on to say that caution must be expressed when identifying Blue-winged Teal when not in full adult plumage. So it looks like BBRC corrected their files but nothing more happened to the record of Cinnamon Teal. Thanks to Mark Grantham and John Marchant for coming up with this information.'

Malta votes against the hunters

It was inevitable that illegal bird persecution would become an issue in Malta's first-ever Euro elections. After all, the hunters had staged a vociferous lobbying campaign in the run-up to Malta joining the EU, pledging to vote against membership unless they secured derogations from the EU Birds Directive that allow spring hunting of Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* and Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur.* Shamefully, the EU conceded rather than risk the referendum going against membership of the union.

One month after Malta and nine other nations joined the EU came the European elections and the hunters' candidate came… nowhere. The five Euro MPs elected were from the Labour Party (three seats) and the conservative National Party (two seats). Prof. Arnold Cassola of the Green Party – who pledged that he would abolish spring hunting – secured 22,938 votes but did not get elected as he was 9,000 votes short. Meanwhile the Malta Hunters' Party candidate, Lino Farrugia, managed just 3,119 votes. As anti-hunting campaigner David Camilleri notes, successive Maltese governments have clearly been held to ransom by a handful of hunters.

But the Maltese massacre of migrant raptors on passage from Sicily to Libya will continue this autumn. If you want to play a part in disrupting this illegal hunting – and see the passage of raptors detailed in last month's *BB* (*Brit. Birds* 97: 318-322) – then join the annual BirdLife Malta Raptor Camp in the Buskett valley, which runs from 8th to 26th September. It is an international gathering of birders who share cheap accommodation and a mission to protect 'our' raptors heading south from Europe to Africa.

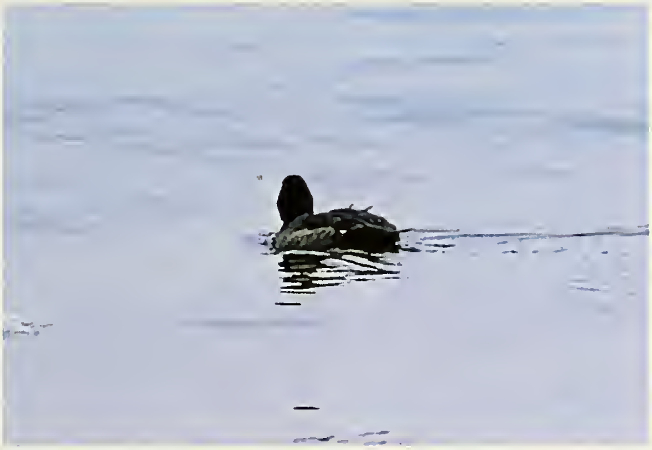
Link: Raptor Camp (http://raptorcamp.birdlifemalta.org).

Correction

Please note that the minimum population estimates for gulls wintering at coastal sites in Scotland in 1983 quoted in Burton *et al.* (2003) (*Brit. Birds* 96: 376-401) are incorrect. The correct figures for table 6 (page 389) are as follows: Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* 131,102, Common Gull *L. canus* 65,281, Lesser Black-backed Gull *L. fuscus* 129, Herring Gull *L. argentatus* 74,425 and Great Black-backed Gull *L. marinus* 5,110.

Monthly Marathon

Photo no. 208: Velvet Scoter



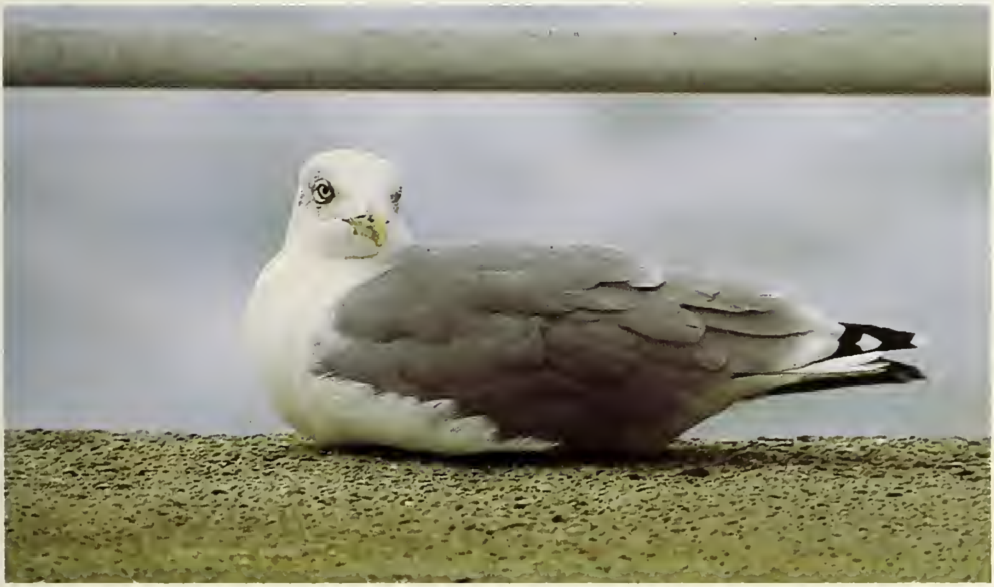
Colin Bradshaw

263. Velvet Scoter *Melanitta fusca.*

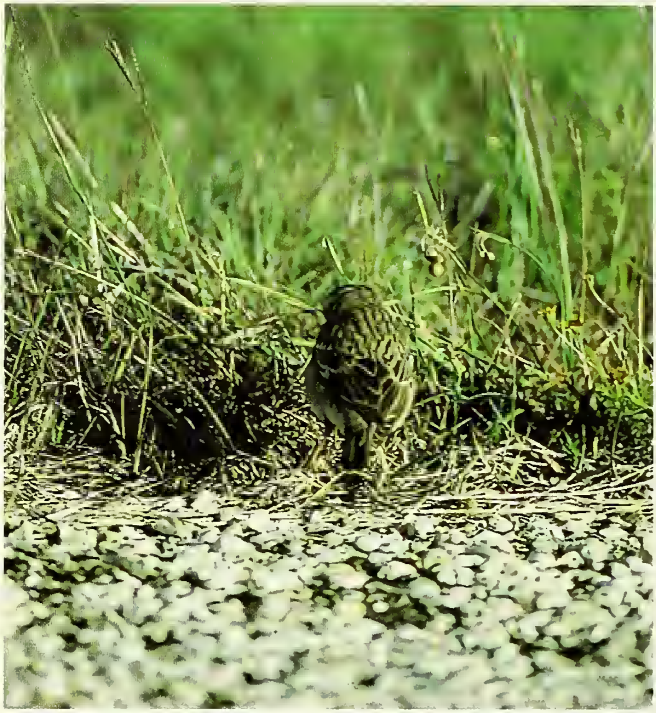
Monthly Marathon photo number 208 (*Brit. Birds* 97: plate 145, repeated here as plate 263) is a real 'stinker', causing your solution-writer many hours of frowning and even more cursing! There are no prizes for making the initial identification as a duck, and one that has chosen to swim away! From there, things go downhill rapidly, as the bird could not have adopted a worse position if it had tried.

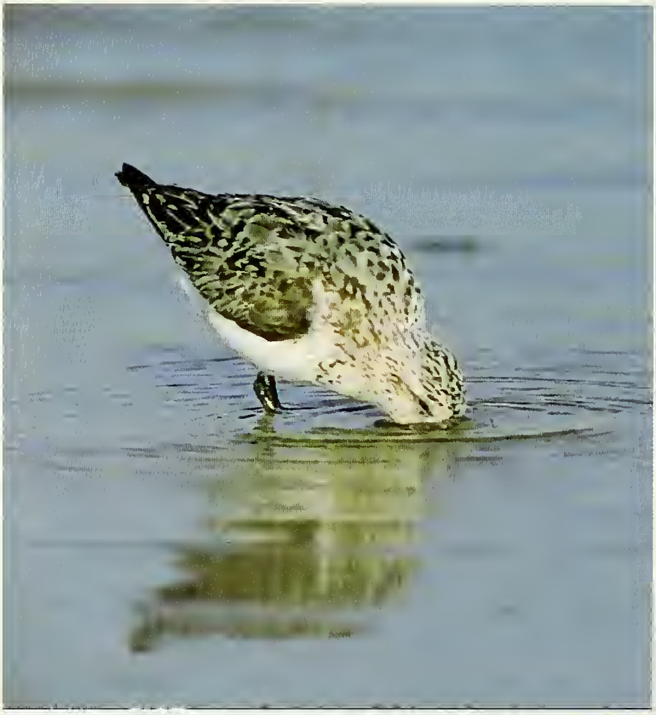
What we can see is a fairly chunky duck, with a rather wide head and prominent tail. Plumage-wise, it is a dark bird, though it seems likely that the apparent blackness of the head and undertail area is at least partly due to shadow. The flanks are paler and greyer than the rest of the plumage, and appear somewhat mottled. A tiny hint of white just behind the flank, indicating some sort of white secondary bar, is practically the only feature we can make out on this otherwise plain, dark bird. We can easily eliminate the dabbling ducks *Anas*, as it is simply much too uniformly dark. We are left with diving ducks of the genus *Aythya*, eiders *Somateria/Polysticta* and scoters *Melanitta* to choose from; the generally unremarkable brownish plumage suggests that it is an immature or female, but of which species?

We might imagine that none of the *Aythya* ducks could ever look as dark and 'cold' blackish-brown as the mystery bird, or that the head-shape is not right, but taking into account the vagaries of light it is difficult to be sure that our bird is not a first-year female Greater Scaup *A. marila* or Tufted Duck *A. fuligula*, or one of an array of similar, but rarer, *Aythya* species. I have to admit that I struggled hard to come up with a convincing



264. 'Monthly Marathon'. Photo no. 211. Ninth stage in thirteenth 'Marathon'. Identify the species and, for this photograph only, the subspecies involved as well. Read the rules (see page 54), then send in your answer on a postcard to Monthly Marathon, c/o The Banks, Mountfield, Robertsbridge, East Sussex TN32 5JY, or by e-mail to editor@britishbirds.co.uk, to arrive by 30th September 2004.





265 & 266. 'Monthly Marathon'. Photographs no. 209 (top) and 210. These pictures form the seventh and eighth stages respectively in the thirteenth 'Marathon'. Identify the species, read the rules (see page 54), then send in your answers on a postcard to Monthly Marathon, c/o The Banks, Mountfield, Robertsbridge, East Sussex TN32 5JY, or by e-mail to editor@britishbirds.co.uk, to arrive **by 30th September 2004**.

explanation as to how the solution should progress from here and, in the end, I resorted to discussing the matter with other SUNBIRD staff. There's nothing to beat getting a fresh perspective on a fraught problem! Killian Mullarney suggested that an intuitive approach to solving a mystery photograph can sometimes guide us more reliably than a rational analysis, but added that the real problem for the solution-writer is trying to unravel the numerous, rapid workings of the intuitive process without rationalising! In this case, he proposed that the shape and proportions are vitally important in eliminating the various female/immature *Aythya* ducks that could closely resemble our mystery bird in terms of plumage. A Greater Scaup or Tufted Duck from this angle would appear to have a proportionately bigger head, or smaller body, than the mystery bird. The 'high-point' of the body is further back than might be expected in an *Aythya*, which tend to peak toward the 'shoulders' or fore-body. Taking a critical look at the image, is that very tiny 'point' at the bottom-left corner of the head, level with the bird's 'shoulder', the tip of its bill? If so, it suggests a long, heavy, eider-like bill. The only eider with white in the secondaries is Steller's Eider *P. stelleri*, but that species has a unique shape with a much more compact look than the mystery bird, and, in adult females at least, the distinct greyish-white tips to strongly curved (and blue-tinged) tertial feathers would be clearly visible from this viewpoint. We are left with the scoters, and of these only Velvet Scoter *M. fusca* has white in the secondaries, often just visible as a tiny speck on the swimming bird, as it is here. The proportionately large body, the head-shape and even the tiny hint of a bill-tip all 'fit' Velvet Scoter; so, having effectively eliminated all other possibilities, we can consider the mystery solved!

Stuart Elsom

Stuart's initial analysis – that this month's photo was a stinker – was borne out by the fact that not one of this month's entrants identified the bird correctly! Furthermore, the votes for the three leading candidates (Greater Scaup, Tufted Duck and Steller's Eider) were almost evenly spread, another sure sign of widespread uncertainty. As well as these three, there were votes for various other diving ducks, with Lesser Scaup *A. affinis* and King Eider *Somateria spectabilis* being at the front of the 'chasing pack'. And so, we effectively start a new competition with photo number 209 (printed in the June issue, and repeated here). As a result, we will extend the deadline on photos 209-211 to 30th September to enable as many people as possible to start from the beginning.

Best of luck to all!

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Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis* Gart Gravel-pits (Lothian), 19th-20th June; Pennington Flash (Greater Manchester), 8th-9th July.

Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus* 5 km SW of Bishop Rock (Scilly), 4th July.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* Fairburn Ings (West Yorkshire), 7th-9th July. **Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus* Hanningfield Reservoir (Essex), 25th June; Minsmere (Suffolk), 2nd-3rd July; Berney Marshes (Norfolk), 3rd-7th July (presumably all the same as the wide-ranging bird reported in April-May; *Brit. Birds* 97: 313).

Black Kite *Milvus migrans* Bowling Green Marsh (Devon), 14th June; Hanging Houghton (Northamptonshire), 16th June. **Red-footed Falcon** *Falco vespertinus* Malin Town (Co. Donegal), 29th June; Sulby Reservoir (Isle of Man), 8th-9th July.

Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus* Aberlady Bay (Lothian), 8th-9th July. **Greater Sand Plover** *Charadrius leschenaultii* Snettisham (Norfolk), 4th-5th July. **Pacific Golden Plover** *Pluvialis fulva* North Ronaldsay (Orkney), 30th June. **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** *Tryngites subruficollis* Tiree (Argyll), 18th-20th June. **Short-billed**

Tim Brown

267. Black Kite *Milvus migrans* Achentoul, Highland, June 2004.

Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus* Tacumshin (Co. Wexford), 30th June to 4th July. **Long-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus scolopaceus* Gibraltar Point (Lincolnshire), 6th-9th July. **Greater Yellowlegs** *Tringa melanoleuca*, Quoile Pondage (Co. Down), 24th May to 16th June. **Spotted Sandpiper** *Actitis macularius* Sandbach Flashes (Cheshire), 12th June; Marsh Lane (West Midlands), 19th-20th June.

Gull-billed Tern *Sterna nilotica* Birling Gap (East Sussex), three, 27th June. **White-winged Black Tern** *Chlidonias leucopterus* Lochs of Spiggie and Hillwell (Shetland), 19th-21st June; North Uist (Outer Hebrides), 23rd June; Taw Estuary (Devon), 2nd-7th July; Fairburn Ings, 5th-7th July.

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* Felixstowe (Suffolk), 12th June. **Red-rumped Swallow** *Hirundo daurica* St Margaret's-at-Cliffe (Kent), 16th June; Heckmondwike (West Yorkshire), 18th June.

Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola* Foula (Shetland), 13th June. **Subalpine Warbler** *Sylvia cantillans* Foula, 12th June.

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* Consols Pool, St Ives (Cornwall), 24th June. **Arctic Redpoll** *Carduelis hornemanni* Lewis (Western Isles), 12th June.

White-throated Sparrow *Zonotrichia albicollis*. Foula, 1st July. **Rustic Bunting** *Emberiza rustica* Foula, 13th June. **Little Bunting** *Emberiza pusilla* Arreton (Isle of Wight), 30th June.

Mike Malpass

268. Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*, Fairburn Ings, West Yorkshire, July 2004.

Steve Young

269. Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius*, Sandbach Flashes, Cheshire, June 2004.

Hugh Harrop

270. First-summer White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*, Loch of Spiggie, Shetland, June 2004.

Roy Harvey

271. White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*, Fairburn Ings, West Yorkshire, July 2004.

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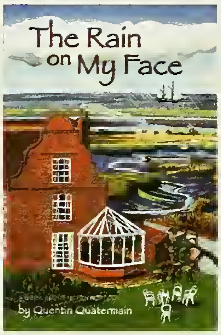

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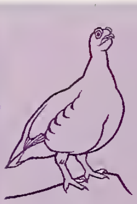

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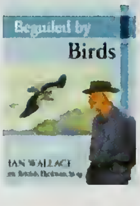

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Biometrics and field identification of Pacific and American Golden Plovers

Oscar W. Johnson and Patricia M. Johnson

ABSTRACT Measurements of Pacific *Pluvialis fulva* and American Golden Plovers *P. dominica* trapped for ringing, combined with observations of birds in the field, showed that most of the field identification criteria described in the literature for separation of these two species are less than satisfactory, owing to the variability of and overlap between the two. Only three characters emerged as reliable: the number of primaries exposed beyond the longest tertial (2-3 in *fulva*, 4-5 in *dominica*); primary projection past the end of the tail (estimated at 0-9 mm in *fulva*, 12-22 mm in *dominica*); and breeding plumage. In some cases, involving moulting birds and those in non-breeding plumage, unequivocal species identification may be impossible.

The separation in the field of Pacific *Pluvialis fulva* and American Golden Plovers *P. dominica* (hereafter referred to simply as *fulva* and *dominica*, respectively) in partial breeding or non-breeding plumages requires careful examination of structural features. A number of different criteria have been proposed in recent years (for example Dunn *et al.* 1987, Golley & Stoddart 1991, Byrkjedal & Thompson 1998), but nevertheless the specific identity of some individuals has sparked substantial discussion and not all birds have been identified satisfactorily.

This paper presents measurements of the two species from individuals trapped for ringing, which enabled various structural identification criteria to be tested. All plovers (often nesting pairs) were in breeding plumage, and consequently there were no uncertainties regarding their identification. What follows is a modified and shortened version of a treatment recently published in *Wader Study Group Bulletin* (Johnson & Johnson 2004). Some of the detailed measurements and discussion in the original paper are not presented here. Instead, we focus on comparisons and tests of field criteria which we hope will prove helpful to birders in the Western Palearctic faced with a putative vagrant *fulva* or *dominica*. This paper also contains several photographs not shown in the original publication.

Study areas and methods

Most of the *fulva* (n=544, trapped in 1979-2002) came from wintering-ground study sites on Oahu, Hawaii, with additional wintering birds (n=14, caught in 2000) from Johnston Atoll, about 1,300 km southwest of Oahu, and others (n=44, trapped in 1988-2002) from breeding grounds on the Seward Peninsula, Alaska. All of the *dominica* (n=46, trapped in 1988-2003) were nesting birds trapped on the Seward Peninsula. The birds were trapped in spring or summer when they were either nearing departure from their wintering grounds (late March or April) or nesting (late May or June). Each bird was sexed on the basis of plumage characters (plates 272-280), and the primaries of adults which had

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been replaced during the previous winter were fully grown (Johnson & Johnson 1983; Johnson & Connors 1996). First-year *fulva* were readily identified by the presence of worn, retained juvenile primaries, but no similar age criterion is apparent in *dominica* (Connors 1983; Johnson & Johnson 1983; Johnson & Connors 1996; Byrkjedal & Thompson 1998).

We recorded the usual biometric dimensions: wing length (flattened, straightened primaries, to the nearest 1.0 mm); total head length, bill length, and tarsus length (all to 0.1 mm). Each of these measurements followed the technique illustrated by Howes & Bakewell (1989).

As a supplement to the standard measurements, we made a systematic effort (mainly in 2002 and 2003) to evaluate additional characters (see Johnson & Connors 1996, Byrkjedal & Thompson 1998) considered to be useful for specific identification. On captured birds, two features of the folded wing were recorded: the number of primary tips beyond the longest tertial, and the distance (to 0.1 mm) between the tips of the two longest primaries. Also recorded were the length of the unfeathered tibia, bill length in relation to the eye (see below), and distance from the base of the bill (at junction with feathering) to the rear edge of the eye. The latter two measurements were made using a straight line from the bill tip across the eye and bisecting the nasal opening. Bill length thus measured was projected with calipers rearward (in other words, as if the bill was hinged at its base) to determine whether this dimension fell on or beyond the eye. In the field, we estimated (with binoculars or a telescope) the distance that the primaries projected beyond the tail (using average bill length from table 1 as a gauge), and where tertial tips were positioned in relation to the tail. Both of these estimates were made with birds in typical postures, either foraging or loafing.

Results

Standard linear dimensions

Wing, head, bill, and tarsus measurements for the two species are shown in table 1 and summarized below. For detailed analyses of these parameters, see Johnson & Johnson (2004).

Pacific Golden Plover

We pooled the wing lengths of adult males and adult females as there was no statistical difference between them. Variable wear of juvenile primaries made a similar test infeasible for first-years, so we pooled wing lengths for first-years also. The difference in wing length between adults and first-years (mean wing length 172 mm and 168 mm, respectively) was highly significant. Each of the other measurements in table 1 combines the two age groups, since there were no significant differences between them. Nonetheless, for each measurement there was a very slight (<1.0 mm), but statistically significant, difference between the sexes, with females averaging smaller than males. Dimorphism at this scale has essentially no practical application, however, and so head, bill, and tarsus measurements of males and females were combined.

American Golden Plover

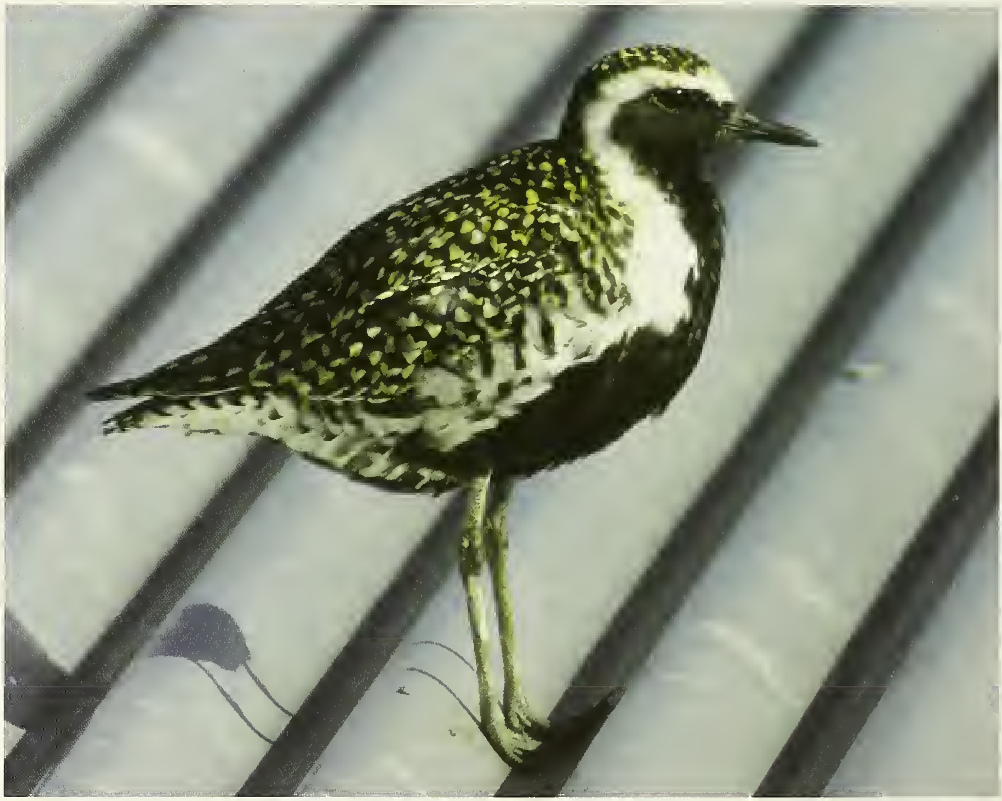
There were no significant differences between the sexes, so all the measurements in table 1 show males and females pooled.

Table 1. Biometrics of Pacific *Pluvialis fulva* and American Golden Plovers *P. dominica* captured for ringing. All measurements in mm, data presented as means ± SD (range, n). For both species, sexes are pooled throughout the table (see text).

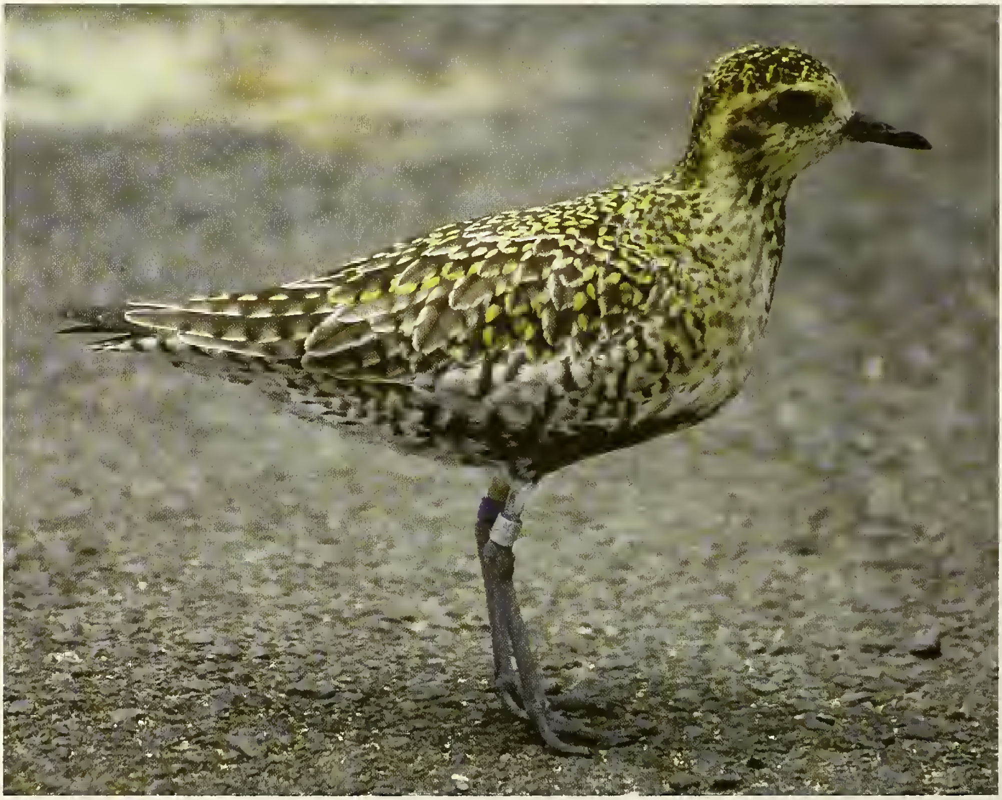
	Pacific Golden Plover[a]	American Golden Plover[b]
Wing length	172 ± 4.1 (158-184, 411) 168 ± 4.2 (148-178, 191)	184 ± 3.9 (176-192, 46)
Total head length	58.5 ± 1.3 (54.1-62.1, 433)	58.2 ± 1.0 (55.6-60.1, 42)
Bill length	24.3 ± 1.1 (20.2-27.6, 441)	22.8 ± 0.8 (21.0-24.7, 45)
Tarsus length	45.9 ± 1.6 (41.7-49.9, 419)	44.1 ± 1.2 (41.9-46.6, 43)

[a] Measurements are from birds on Oahu (Hawaii), Johnston Atoll, and Seward Peninsula (Alaska); see text. First line of wing length refers to adults, second line to first-years. The two groups were separated because wings of first-year *fulva* are shortened owing to wear of juvenile primaries. All other data show adults and first-years pooled.

[b] Measurements are from nesting birds on the Seward Peninsula. All data show adults pooled with possible first-years (see text).



272. Oscar W. Johnson



273. Oscar W. Johnson

Interspecific comparison

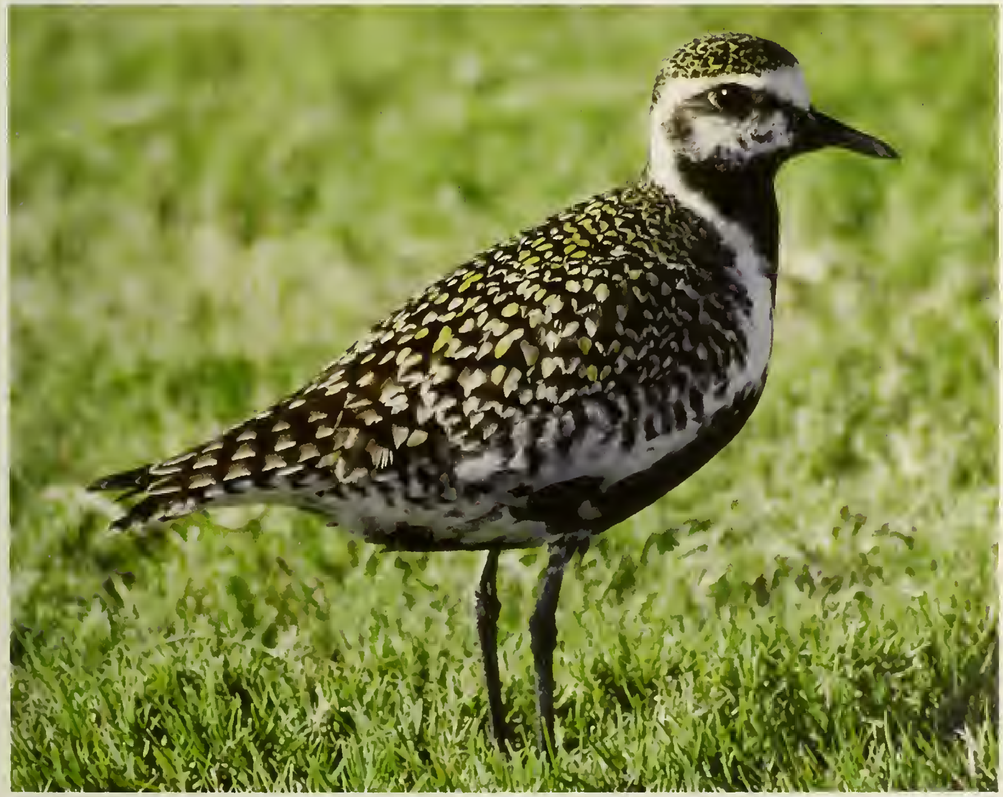
As shown in table 1, wing length differed greatly between the two species, with *dominica* being 12 mm longer than *fulva*, on average. Ranges for the other measurements overlap broadly. Head length does not vary interspecifically, whereas mean bill and tarsus lengths are significantly different (longer in *fulva*), but at a scale of <2.0 mm. Of the measurements in table 1, only the difference in wing length is a useful field criterion.

Variation across breeding ranges

For both species, there were statistically significant differences among data from this study and comparable measurements from other regions. We found that *fulva* from the Alaskan end of the species' range showed a clear tendency to be larger in all dimensions except wing length (the latter was essentially the same from Alaska west to the Taimyr peninsula) when compared with Siberian birds from the Anadyr, Yakutia and Taimyr regions; and that *dominica* from the Seward Peninsula had, on average, shorter wings and tarsi but longer bills than birds from Churchill, Manitoba. These regional differences (treated in more detail in the original paper) are all relatively small and are of no value for field identification.

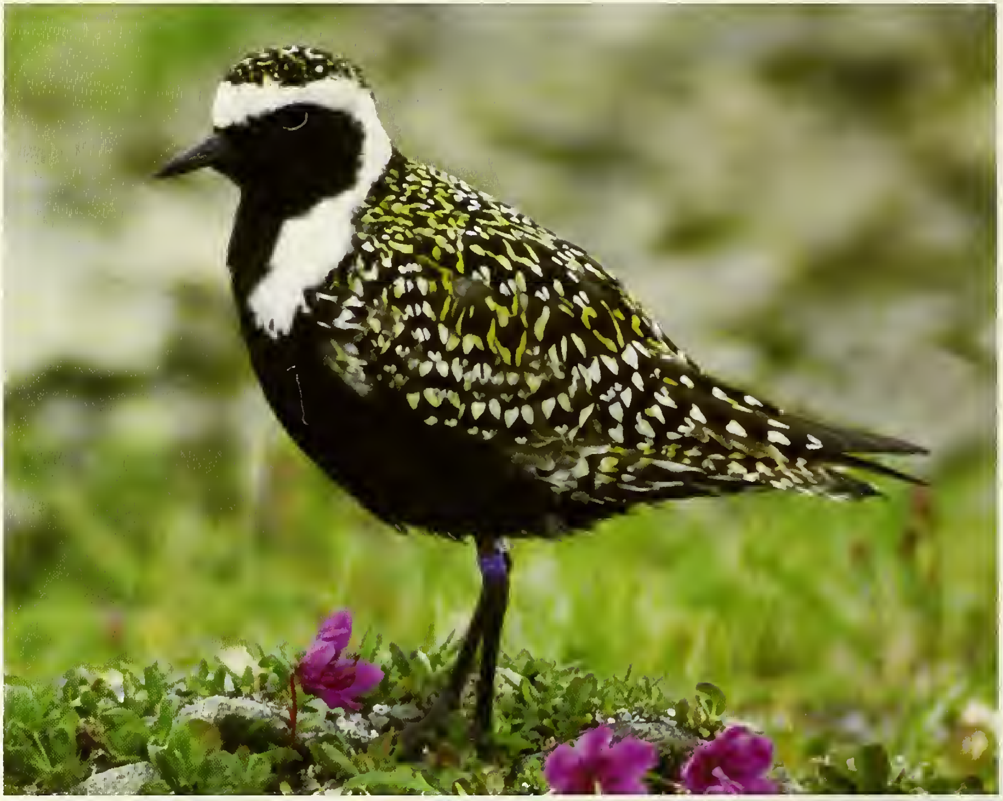
Features and measurements relating to field identification

Apart from the plumage of birds in breeding dress, the number of primary tips exposed beyond the longest tertial and the projection of the primaries beyond the tail tip were the most satisfactory criteria for specific identification (table 2). All the birds captured for ringing, as well as those observed in the field, were clearly separable to species from the number of primary tips visible past the tertials (2-3 in *fulva*, 4-5 in *dominica*). Of 44 *fulva* examined in the hand, almost all (42) had three exposed primary tips, while two birds showed two. Of 23



274. Oscar W. Johnson

272-274. Examples of Pacific Golden Plovers *Pluvialis fulva* in full breeding plumage. All were photographed in late April; 272 at Johnston Atoll, 273 & 274 on Oahu, Hawaii. The male in plate 272 shows the characteristic irregular wash of white along the breast-sides and upper flanks, plus mostly white undertail-coverts. Females in breeding plumage are variable, ranging from relatively drab individuals (273), with sides of head and neck predominantly yellowish-buff, to more colourful birds (274) with white neck- and breast-sides, and flanks.



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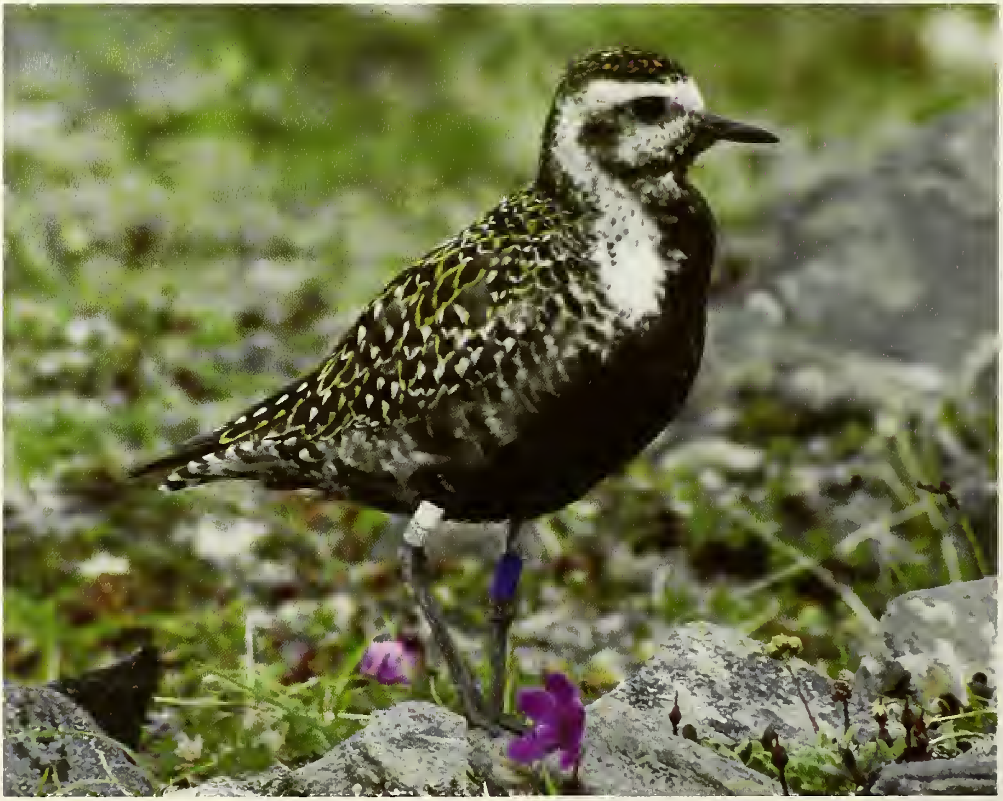

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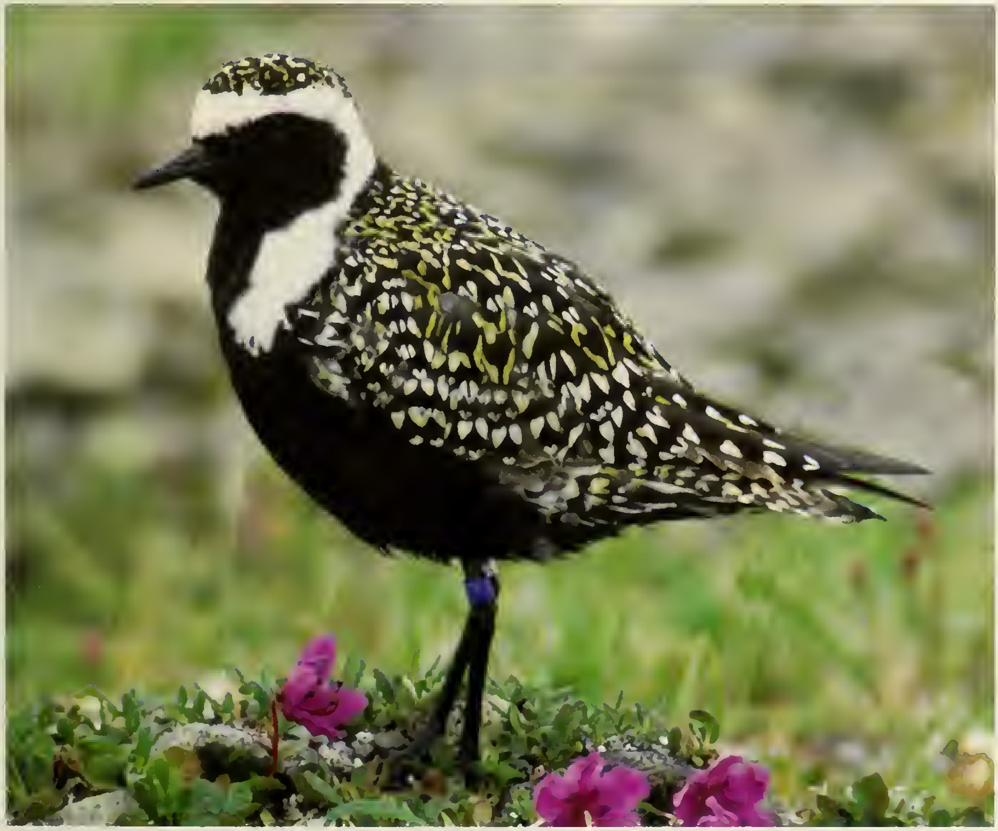
Table 2. Features associated with the field identification of Pacific *Pluvialis fulva* and American Golden Plovers *P. dominica*[a]. Data show mean in mm ± SD (range, n) where possible.

	Pacific Golden Plover	American Golden Plover
Primary tips exposed beyond longest tertial	2-3 in all birds (n=44)	4-5 in all birds (n=23)
Primary projection past end of the tail[b]	0-9 mm (n=50)	12-22 mm (n=34)
Distance between tips of two longest primaries	2.7 ± 1.7 (0-6.0, 44)	5.0 ± 1.7 (0.5-9.0, 23)
Length of unfeathered tibia	20.4 ± 1.8 (17.6-24.1, 37)	16.7 ± 1.7 (14.8-21.2, 23)
Percentage with bill projecting beyond rear edge of eye[c]	91% (40 of 44)	62% (18 of 29)
Bill projection beyond eye[c]	2.6 ± 1.2 (0.2-5.2, 40)	1.6 ± 0.9 (0.3-3.7, 18)
Base of bill to rear edge of eye[c]	21.4 ± 0.9 (19.0-23.1, 44)	22.0 ± 0.9 (20.0-24.0, 29)
Tertial length relative to tail length[b]	Tertials extend to distal third of tail, falling at or near tail tip in most	Variable, from half to distal third of tail

[a] Features considered here are based on descriptive summaries of the two species by Johnson & Connors (1996) and Byrkjedal & Thompson (1998). Measurements of *fulva* from the Seward Peninsula (Alaska) and Oahu (Hawaii), all *dominica* from the Seward Peninsula.

[b] Estimates based on observations of birds in the field (see text).

[c] See text for procedures relating to bill/eye measurements.

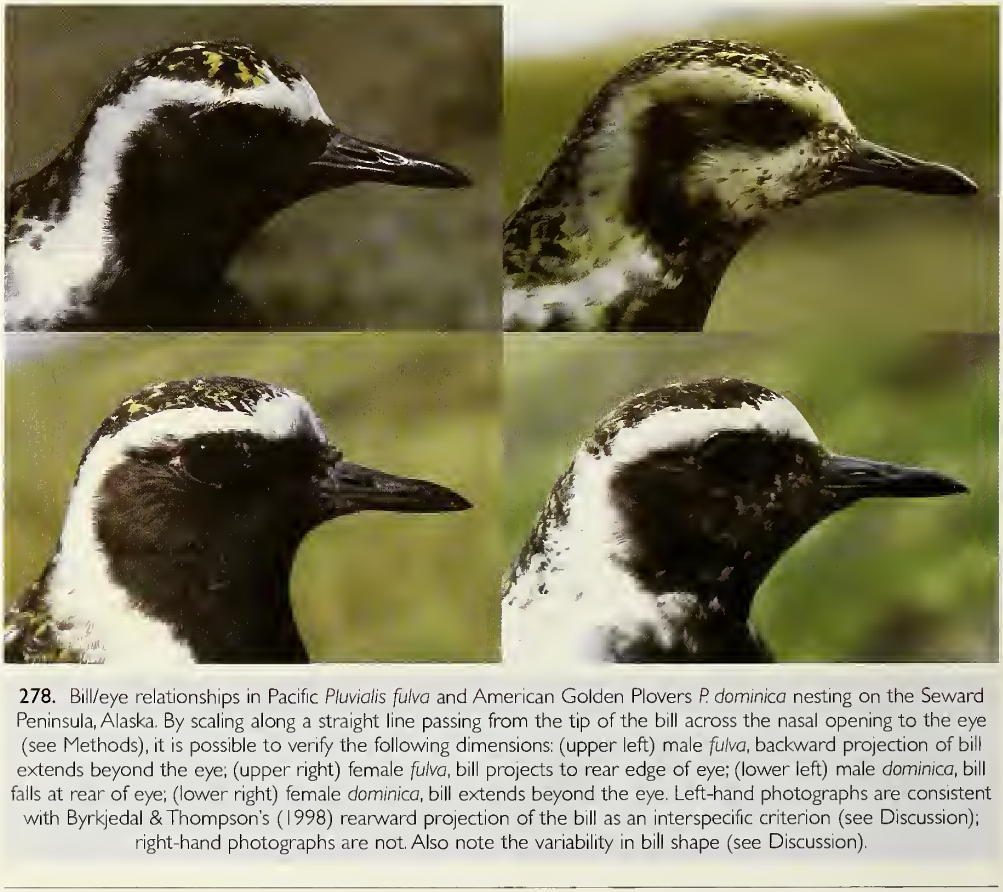


277. Oscar W. Johnson

275-277. Examples of American Golden Plovers *Pluvialis dominica* in full breeding plumage. These individuals (all members of nesting pairs) were photographed in June on the Seward Peninsula, Alaska. The male in plate 275 shows the typical abrupt termination of white on the breast, together with black flanks and undertail-coverts. As with Pacific Golden Plovers *P. fulva*, females are variable. Some have whitish faces (276), while others are darker with almost male-like coloration (277).

trapped *dominica*, 22 had four exposed primary tips and one bird had five. Similarly, the projection of primary tips past the tail was obviously different between the two species. Among *fulva* (n=50), estimates ranged from 0 mm (primary tips aligned with tail tip, though in a few cases the primaries actually fell slightly short of the end of the tail) to an estimated maximum of 9 mm beyond the tail. In *dominica* (n=34), estimated projection past the tail ranged from 12 to 22 mm. Relative to the bill, these dimensions approximate to a primary projection beyond the tail of less than half the bill length in *fulva*, and equal to or greater than half the bill length in *dominica*.

Other features which have been proposed as aids to separate the two species in the field (bill length, tarsus length, distance between the tips of the two longest primaries, length of unfeathered tibia, bill/eye relationship, and position of tertial tip in relation to the tail) were less useful as there was considerable overlap for them all (tables 1 and 2). Our findings for these characters are as follows. The distance between the two longest primary tips ranged from 0 mm (feathers the same length) to 6 mm in *fulva*, and from 2 mm to 9 mm in all *dominica* but one (0.5 mm). Of 44 *fulva*, nine (20%) showed primary-tip separation of 1 mm or less; most *dominica* (17 of 23, 74%) exceeded 4 mm. The mean length of the unfeathered tibia differed significantly between the two species, with *fulva* averaging nearly 4 mm longer than *dominica*. When projected rearward (see Methods), the bill extended beyond the eye in almost all *fulva* (91%) and most *dominica* (62%), with mean distance past the rear edge of the eye being 2.6 mm and 1.6 mm, respectively. Although mean distance from the base of the bill to the rear margin of the eye showed only slight interspecific variation (22.0 mm in *dominica*, 21.4 mm in *fulva*; table 2), the difference is statistically significant. Almost all *fulva* had tertials which reached almost to the end of the tail. This feature varied among *dominica*, with tertial tips falling from about the middle of the tail to near the tail tip.



Oscar W. Johnson

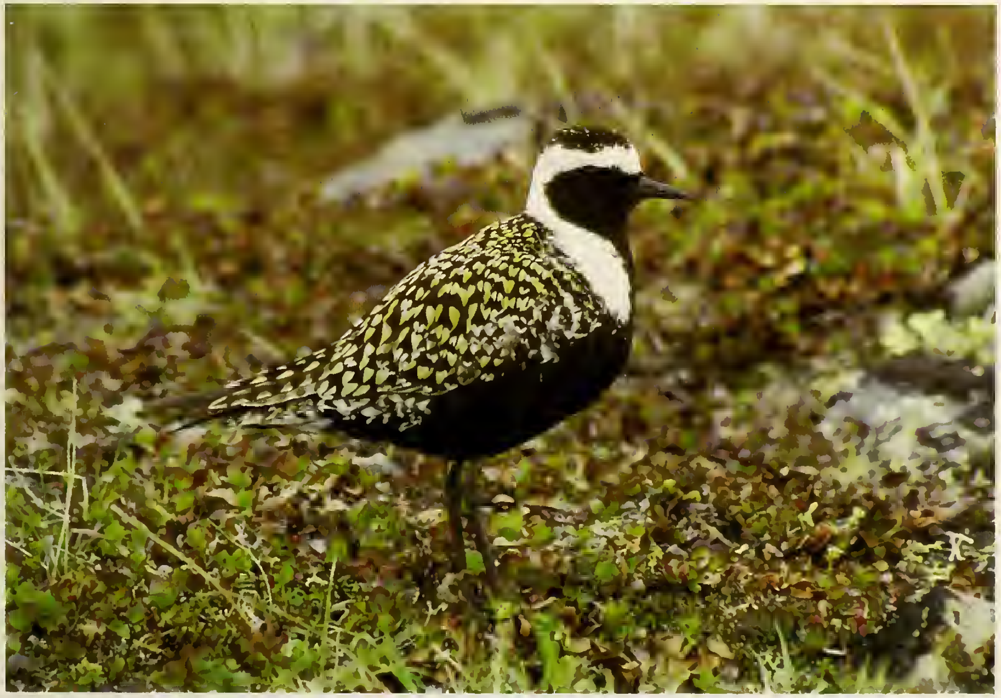
278. Bill/eye relationships in Pacific *Pluvialis fulva* and American Golden Plovers *P. dominica* nesting on the Seward Peninsula, Alaska. By scaling along a straight line passing from the tip of the bill across the nasal opening to the eye (see Methods), it is possible to verify the following dimensions: (upper left) male *fulva*, backward projection of bill extends beyond the eye; (upper right) female *fulva*, bill projects to rear edge of eye; (lower left) male *dominica*, bill falls at rear of eye; (lower right) female *dominica*, bill extends beyond the eye. Left-hand photographs are consistent with Byrkjedal & Thompson's (1998) rearward projection of the bill as an interspecific criterion (see Discussion); right-hand photographs are not. Also note the variability in bill shape (see Discussion).

Discussion

Because *dominica* begin to depart from their South American wintering grounds as early as January, most of the pre-breeding moult takes place while birds are en route north. A similar pattern occurs with *fulva* wintering in the far southern hemisphere, whereas birds in Hawaii typically complete their pre-breeding moult before departure. Consequently, in both species, the plumage of spring migrants may vary from partial breeding (with attendant problems of identification) to full breeding, depending on where and when they are seen. From about April to July, breeding plumage is fully developed and identification problems are minimal as the two species (particularly males) have well defined differences in plumage that are clearly shown in most field guides (see also plates 272-277).

Adults commence their post-breeding body moult on the nesting grounds, and by autumn migration the mix of old and new feathers may blur the distinction between species. Various authors have pointed out that, in all plumages, *fulva* typically have more brightly coloured yellowish upperparts than *dominica*, the latter tending to be greyish. While this is a useful feature, particularly for juvenile and non-breeding individuals, it is not diagnostic. We have seen individual *fulva* in greyish *dominica*-like plumage in Hawaii during autumn and winter, while others have noted sufficient overlap in coloration between the two species in juvenile and non-breeding plumages to preclude specific identification in some cases (Connors 1983; Dunn *et al.* 1987; Marchant & Higgins 1993; Paulson 1993; Beaman & Madge 1998).

Most identification problems will occur from August to March, when birds are not in breeding plumage, making structural characters (table 2) particularly important. Of the features given in table 2, the first two (exposed primary tips and primary projection beyond the tail) are by far the most valuable. It is likely that the number of primaries visible beyond the tertials (2-3 in *fulva*, 4-5 in *dominica*) remains a reliable indicator throughout autumn migration, since the tertials are probably not shed until birds reach winter quarters. The moult and wear of


Oscar W. Johnson

279. Breeding male American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*, Seward Peninsula, Alaska. This individual shows the lengthy projection of primaries past the tail characteristic of the species. However, the tertials are unusual, as they extend almost to the tail tip, which is more typical of Pacific Golden Plover *P. fulva*. As this bird moved about, while being photographed, it was evident that the tip of the 7th primary was visible (but just barely) beyond the longest tertial.

tertials does, however, need further evaluation.

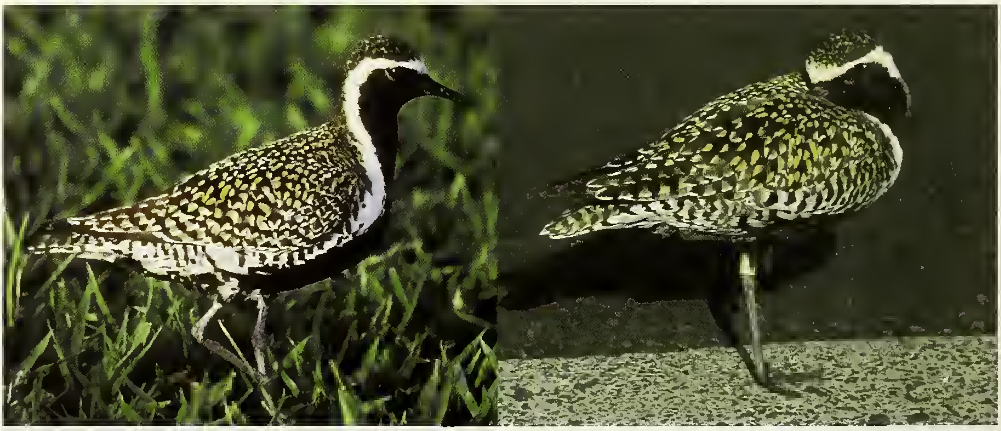
It is important to note that close spacing of the two longest primary tips, common in *fulva* but much less frequent in our sample of *dominica*, may give the impression in the field of a single feather. This is unlikely to result in misidentification of *fulva*, but could be misleading when encountering a vagrant *dominica* if three primary tips are counted beyond the tertials in error for four. Primary projection beyond the tail (0-9 mm in *fulva*, 12-22 mm in *dominica*) seems likely to be a good criterion for most of the year in both species, except during moult of the outermost primaries on the wintering grounds (Johnson & Connors 1996; Byrkjedal & Thompson 1998).

The measurements made in this study further confirm that *fulva* have, on average, a longer bill and leg (both tarsus and unfeathered tibia), and closer spacing of the tips of the two longest primaries than *dominica*. There is, however, considerable overlap between the two species in these measurements (tables 1 and 2), meaning that these features have only limited application in the field (see also Dunn *et al.* 1987, Golley & Stoddart 1991, Paulson 1993, Svensson *et al.* 1999). Bill shape has also been suggested as a helpful feature, but plate 278 shows that this is both inconsistent and too subjective to be a useful field criterion.

Byrkjedal & Thompson (1998) proposed the use of a bill/eye relationship to help separate *fulva* from *dominica*, suggesting that when the bill length is projected rearward it 'reaches well beyond the eye in Pacific, but barely across the eye in American Golden Plovers'. Although our measurements showed that this is often correct, there were individuals where the converse was true (plate 278). Moreover, such a criterion is difficult to apply without the bird in the hand or without high-quality photographs.

The tertial/tail relationship as a field mark was described by both Golley & Stoddart (1991) and Byrkjedal & Thompson (1998), who suggested that the tip of the longest tertial falls level with or slightly short of the tail tip in *fulva*, but well short of the tail tip in *dominica*. We found that most *fulva* conform to this pattern, but that *dominica* are more variable, with tertial tips ranging from about the halfway point on the tail to the distal third. Furthermore, a few individuals had tertials somewhat shorter (*fulva*) or longer (*dominica*) than more typical birds (plates 279-280). All these variants had species-specific wing and tail features (visible primary tips and primary projection beyond the tail), although the wings of the *dominica* shown in plate 279 required close viewing to confirm four exposed primary tips.

In conclusion, among the *fulva* and *dominica* in our study populations we found only three reliable visual criteria for separating the two species. These are: the number of primary tips exposed beyond the tertials (2-3 in *fulva*, 4-5 in *dominica*); the extent of the primary projection beyond the tail (0-9 mm in *fulva*, 12-22 mm in *dominica*); and the plumage of breeding birds from approximately April through July. Clearly, the first two features will be less accurate during primary moult on the wintering grounds.



Oscar W. Johnson

280. Two male Pacific Golden Plovers *Pluvialis fulva* in breeding plumage, just before spring migration from Oahu, Hawaii. Like many *fulva*, both birds have primary tips more or less aligned with the tail tip, but their tertials resemble those of some American Golden Plovers *P. dominica* in that they extend only to about half the length of the tail.

Although our studies were based on adult and first-year birds, the foregoing structural criteria should work equally well for separating juvenile *dominica* and *fulva* (for example, see photos in Dunn *et al.* 1987 and Golley & Stoddart 1991). It should be recognised (and here we concur with a number of other authors) that despite the best efforts of dedicated observers to confirm extralimital records of these plovers, some of the latter will be impossible to identify with certainty.

Acknowledgments

Our studies were variously funded over the years by the National Geographic Society, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Hawaii Audubon Society, and Moorhead State University (Minnesota). We thank various officials of the U.S. Air Force, U.S. Veterans Administration, and the Hawaii Division of Forestry and Wildlife for permits and access to study sites in Hawaii. The U.S. National Park Service in Nome kindly provided support for portions of our work in Alaska. The many individuals who assisted us in the field and otherwise facilitated this project are acknowledged in the original paper. Richard Chandler kindly helped prepare this version of our paper, and we are grateful to the International Wader Study Group for allowing us to publish this modified version of our original article.

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Looking back

Seventy-five years ago:

'LARDER OF RED-BACKED SHRIKE. A PAIR of Red-backed Shrikes (*Lanius c. collurio*) have for the third year in succession built a nest in the hedge of our small paddock of about two acres at Bourton-on-the-Water, Gloucestershire. This year, however, has been the first in which we have observed the male bird make a larder. In one afternoon we discovered seven humble-bees impaled on blunt spurs, from half an inch in length, of alder, birch and hazel. The hedge in which the nest is built is largely of hawthorn, but the bird seems to have deliberately chosen thornless trees for his victims.

'The humble-bees, all queens, were impaled through the thorax, at all angles, one being upside down, and were of the following species:- *Bombus ruderatus* (typical and var. *harrisellus*, Kirby), *B. jonellus, B. helferanus, B. lucorum, Psithyrus distinctus* and *P. barbutellus.*

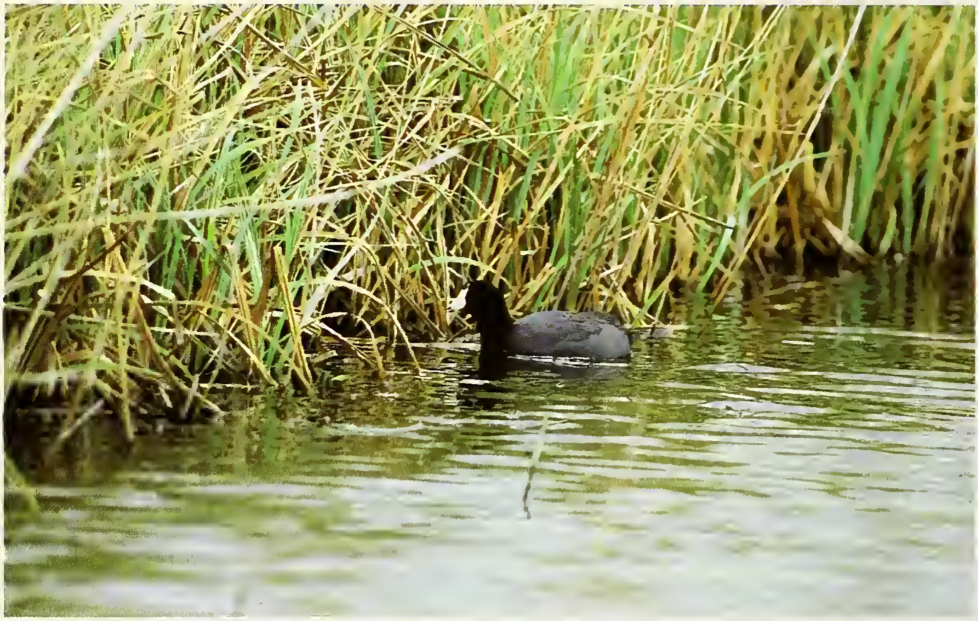
'After we had removed and examined the bees, the Shrike later the same evening captured a dor-beetle and impaled it on one of the alders. The next day three more humble-bees were added.

'As soon as the nest contained a full complement of eggs the male bird ceased making a larder.

'As bees of the genus *Psithyrus* are deadly parasites of the true humble-bee or *Bombus*, the fact that a number of *Psithyrus* queens were included in the larder is worthy of note. HELEN E. DONOVAN.' (*Brit. Birds* 23: 96, September 1929)

American Coot in Kent: new to Britain

Chris Hindle



281. First-winter American Coot *Fulica americana*, Stodmarsh, Kent, April 1996. *Steve Young*

ABSTRACT Following the decision to separate the British and Irish Lists, an American Coot *Fulica americana* found at Stodmarsh, Kent, on 16th April 1996, now becomes the first record for Britain. The American Coot at Ballycotton, Co. Cork, from 7th February to 4th April 1981, remains the first record for Ireland.

On 16th April 1996, I was birding at Stodmarsh NNR, Kent, together with my wife Anne and son Matthew. Although migrants were uppermost in my mind, I thought that this would be a timely opportunity to familiarise myself with Common Coots *Fulica atra* prior to a birding trip to northern Morocco, where Red-knobbed Coot *F. cristata* would be a possibility. I was conscious that I needed to be absolutely sure what a Common Coot actually looked like! Upon reaching the Lampen Wall, I paused and scanned the reedbed and pools while the others carried on ahead. Having seen nothing of note, I turned my attention to the Common Coots. I focussed my binoculars on the nearest coot, which was feeding actively about 20 m in front of me, and was surprised to find that the bird in question had no indentation where the bill met the shield and, furthermore, had what appeared to be a patch of black skin above the oddly shaped shield. Somewhat bemused, I looked again and noticed a black subterminal band on the bill. Although I was unfamiliar with American Coot *F. americana*, not having been to North America, I recalled the account of the bird at Ballycotton, Co. Cork, in 1981 (Hutchinson *et al.* 1984), which mentioned that it had white undertail-coverts. I looked once more at the bird in front of me and, lo and behold, there they were: conspicuous white undertail-coverts!

Although my wife and son returned in due course, and checked through the features I had observed, there was no one else to discuss the bird with, and since I had a suspicion that a hybrid Common Coot × Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* could be confused with American Coot, we decided to return home and compare our notes with published descriptions. These seemed to confirm that the bird I had found was indeed an American Coot! I then phoned various people, most of whom were out, but eventually I managed to track down Brian Short at work, and he agreed to meet me at Stodmarsh 45 minutes later. Brian passed the news on to John Cantelo, and it was in fact John who arrived at Stodmarsh first. John concurred with my identification, as, shortly afterwards, did Brian Short and Don Worsfold. By this time, the bird had swum off into a small stream running into the main dyke, so our views were adequate rather than exceptional, and the bird continued to feed here for the remainder of the evening. By the following morning, it had returned to the main dyke, and the large crowd which had gathered were rewarded with excellent views of this national 'first'. Over the following week, it entertained hundreds, if not thousands, of birders, and continued to be seen regularly until 29th or 30th April (*Brit Birds* 90: 467).

Description

The bird's overall structure appeared slightly less bulky than that of Common Coot, with a flatter back and a more angular or 'chunky' head on a shorter neck. It was a particularly active bird, constantly diving and pulling up pondweed, which was consumed on the surface. When swimming, it had a head-jerking action similar to that shown by Moorhen.

The entire head and neck were essentially jet black, which merged into the fairly uniform greyish-black body. When up-ending to dive, the lower belly was noted as being pale grey. Only the outer undertail-coverts were white, and these were clearly not as well marked or conspicuous as those of Moorhen.

The bill and the small frontal shield on the forehead were cold white with a slight ivory tint, but the bill tip appeared to show a hint of blue, not pink as often seen in Common Coot. The bill also possessed an obvious dark subterminal band that became diffuse towards the cutting edge and which, at close range, appeared to show a slight reddish tinge. Above the 'U-shaped' upper border to the shield, there was a slightly swollen, oval-shaped patch of bare skin which appeared black through binoculars but was, in fact, dark red when seen through a telescope. The profile formed where the edge of the bill and shield met the black feathering of the head was almost straight, unlike Common Coot, which has a marked indentation of black feathering coming to a point and partially separating the shield and bill. The irides were red, while the legs and feet appeared little different from those of Common Coot.

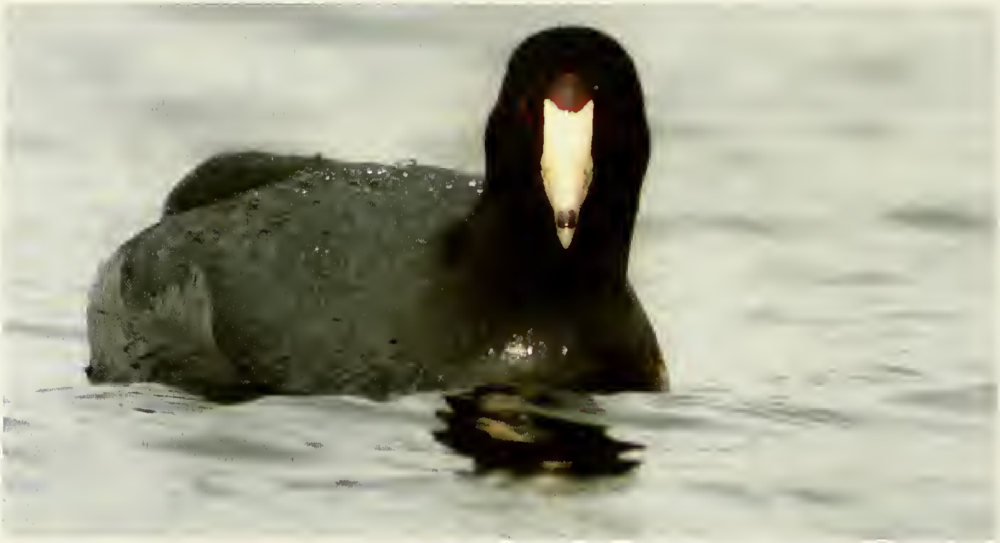
It was largely silent, but when threatened by territorial Common Coots it uttered a repeated gruff 'kwok'.

Earlier occurrences in the Western Palearctic

Prior to the Kent bird's arrival, there had been at least seven records of American Coot in the Western Palearctic. The first was in Iceland on 7th November 1969, which was followed by a bird found long-dead in the same country on 10th March 1971 (Cramp & Simmons 1980). One caught and released in the Azores on 25th October 1971 bore a Canadian ring, and was subsequently found to have been ringed in Ontario on 30th August 1971 (Dennis 1981). The afore-mentioned Irish bird was found at Ballycotton on 8th February 1981 and remained until 4th April (Hutchinson *et al.* 1984). One in the Faeroe Islands in November 1985 is mentioned by Snow & Perrins (1998) but without supporting details. An adult found dead on Pico, Azores, on 3rd December 1991, was the second record for that archipelago (*Birding World* 6: 20), while the first for Iberia was a first-winter at Ludo, Faro, Portugal, on 17th September 1992 (*Brit. Birds* 88: 270).

Breeding and wintering range

American Coot breeds across a vast area of temperate southern Canada and the USA, from southern New Brunswick east to southern Vancouver Island. To the south, its range extends throughout much of the USA, Mexico, the West Indies and Central America, with isolated populations extending into South America, in the northern and central Andes. Northern birds, and in particular those breeding to the east of the Rocky Mountains are largely migratory, wintering in the southern USA, although small numbers occasionally remain on ice-free parts



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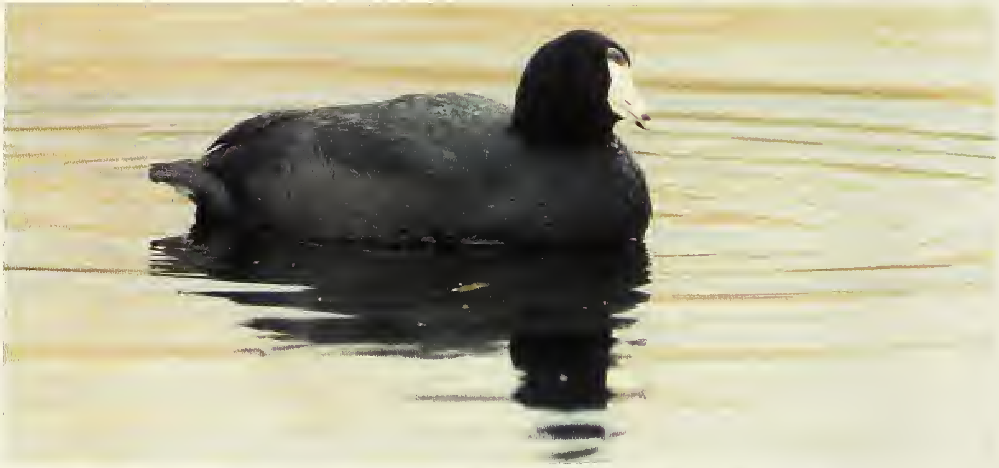

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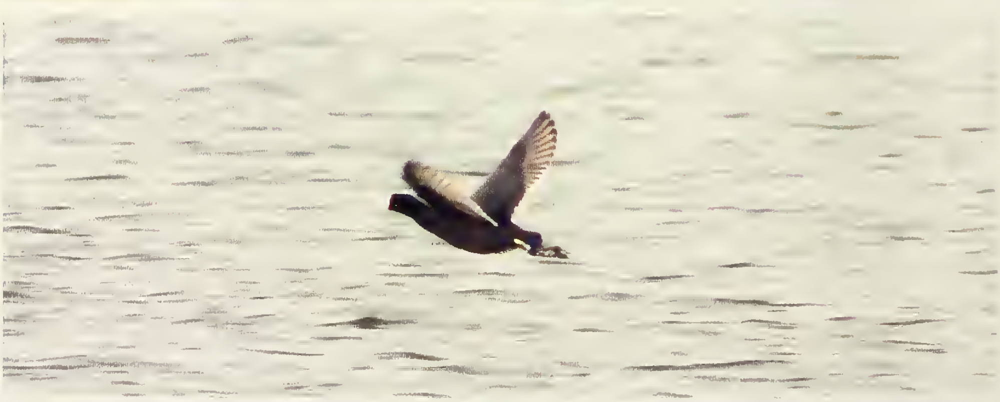

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282-284. First-winter American Coot *Fulica americana*, Stodmarsh, Kent, April 1996. In combination, these plates show most of the key characteristics of American Coot. The dark, subterminal band on the bill and the distinctively shaped shield (in particular the 'U'-shaped top, with spot of dark red skin above; but also the lack of a 'point' of dark feathering between the bill base and the shield) give the bird are quite different head-and-bill pattern to that of Common Coot *F. atra*. The flanks are distinctly greyish, paler that the black head and neck, and the white undertail coverts can just be seen in plate 283. In flight, the striking white tips to the secondaries are more extensive and obvious than in Common Coot.

of southern Ontario. Cramp & Simmons (1980) note that autumn passage along the Mississippi flyway extends from mid September to November, with a peak in the second half of October. Return movement to breeding areas extends from the second half of March and throughout April, with peak passage through Maryland, USA, between 25th March and 25th April.

Discussion

It appears unlikely that the Kent American Coot had recently crossed the North Atlantic. Transatlantic vagrancy during the previous autumn, followed by over-wintering somewhere in western Europe, seems more likely to account for its appearance at Stodmarsh. In fact, the timing of its arrival coincided with the period of peak northbound movement of migrants along the eastern seaboard of the USA (see above), suggesting that this individual was behaving exactly as a wild bird would in North America.

Subsequently, American Coot has appeared in Britain on four further occasions. One at South Walney, Cumbria on 17th April 1999 (*Brit. Birds* 93: 528) remained for just one day. This was followed by no fewer than three Scottish records during autumn/winter 2003/04: one at Loch of Clickimin, Shetland, was present from 30th November 2003 to 5th April 2004; one on West Loch Ollay, South Uist, Western Isles, stayed from 25th January to 7th April 2004; while one at Castle Loch, Dumfries & Galloway, was present on 11th and 17th February 2004 (the last three records are currently under consideration by BBRC). Elsewhere, the Azores has proved to be the most likely location for finding American Coot in the Western Palearctic, with a total of 12 occurrences. To the end of 2003, the national totals of American Coot recorded in the Western Palearctic were: Azores 12, Faeroe Islands 1, Great Britain 4, Iceland 2, Ireland 1, Portugal 1, Spain 2.

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EDITORIAL COMMENT Colin Bradshaw, Chairman of the British Birds Rarities Committee commented: 'Following the extraordinary "influx" of this species last winter, this is a very appropriate time to publish this record. While few of us spend much time watching coots, once in a while something exciting can turn up. With the white undertail-coverts, smaller bill shield and dark subterminal bill markings, there is enough to make American Coot a subtly distinct bird. In addition, compared with Common Coot, it is slightly smaller, the plumage is usually less intensely black, and the pale tips to the secondaries are more distinct. The key confusion bird, as Chris Hindle observes in his account, is really a hybrid Common Coot × Moorhen. These are extremely rare, but those that have been described show many of the features of American Coot and help to illustrate why a detailed description covering all the key features is required for a vagrant American. Hybrids can also be smaller (than Common Coot), and show white undertail-coverts and less intense black plumage. However, features such as the broad, white tips to the secondaries and the bill-band are usually lacking. The Kent bird was aged as a first-winter, owing to the brownish flight-feathers and the extent of pale feathering on the belly.'

Eric Meek, Chairman of the British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee, commented: 'BOURC considered the Stodmarsh American Coot record during the winter of 1996/97 and accepted it unanimously after a rapid circulation taking just three months. The species was considered to be a likely vagrant (since a pattern of occurrence in the Western Palearctic was already apparent) and an unlikely escape from captivity, so the Committee had no hesitation in adding it to Category A of the British List. Considering the number now occurring in the Azores, it is perhaps surprising that only one more had been found in Britain prior to the unprecedented events of the past winter.'

Little Gulls at sea off Yorkshire in autumn 2003

Clive Hartley

Little Gulls *Larus minutus* and Kittiwakes *Rissa tridactyla*. *Richard Johnson*

ABSTRACT During autumn 2003, record numbers of Little Gulls *Larus minutus* were present off the Yorkshire coast. This paper estimates the extent of this gathering and describes the birds' behaviour, based on observations from both sea and land. The context of these sightings, with respect to previous Yorkshire records, is discussed. This analysis suggests that the western North Sea is becoming an increasingly important 'stop-over' area for adult and second-year Little Gulls in late summer and autumn, when a significant proportion of the Baltic breeding population can be found in the North Sea basin, undergoing their complete post-breeding moult before dispersing to wintering grounds.

During 11th-12th September 2003, an extraordinary gathering of Little Gulls *Larus minutus* was observed off the Yorkshire coast, in the sea area between Spurn Point in the south and Flamborough Head in the north, the magnitude of which far surpassed all previous records. The first signs of this gathering became apparent from mid morning on 11th September, when, during the course of a ship-based survey, the author and Peter Ullrich began to observe substantial numbers of Little Gulls and Kittiwakes *Rissa tridactyla* among mixed feeding flocks of seabirds some 15-25 km offshore between Withernsea and Aldbrough. These events were repeated the following day, when a survey of the sea area immediately to the north, offshore between Aldbrough and Skipsea, revealed further feeding flocks between 15 and 25 km out. These flocks took the form of dense clusters, containing up to 120 Little Gulls, which were located within a band some 5.5 km wide (on average), and stretching for about 32 km from north to south (from 53°58'90"N 00°05'90"E to 53°46'50"N 00°19'00"E; fig. 1).

In total, 615 Little Gulls and 1,655 Kittiwakes were counted during four parallel transects on 11th September (with an additional 300+ Little Gulls and 1,000+ Kittiwakes estimated to be present beyond the seaward end of these transects), and 1,220 Little Gulls and 2,210 Kittiwakes were logged during four additional parallel transects on 12th September. Since these transects cut across the band of Little Gulls at approximately 5-km intervals, and as the sheer amount of activity precluded estimates of birds more than 500 m either side of the ship, it is possible that the total number of birds involved was up to five times these figures, which would estimate the total of Little Gulls to be in excess of 9,500.

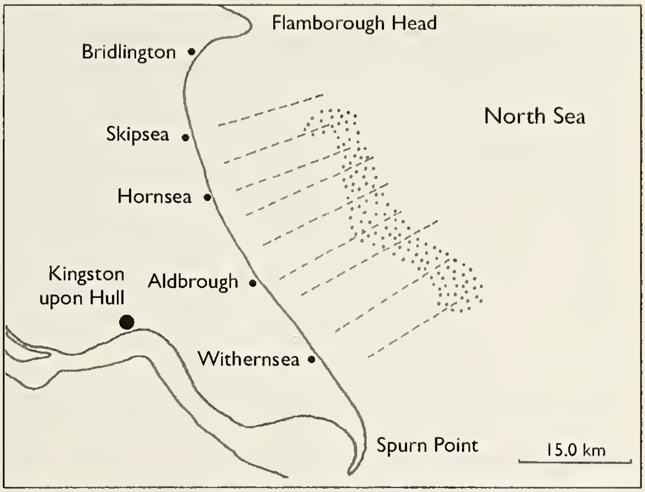

Fig. 1. Location of feeding seabird flock off the Yorkshire coast on 11th-12th September 2003 (stippled area), with route of transect survey indicated (dashed lines).

Although we cannot rule out some degree of overlap or double-counting between the two days in question, this seems unlikely given the fact that our transect surveys were carried out in sequence from south to north against the run of the tide, whereas the centre of gravity of the bird activity appeared to be shifting gradually south during the same period. Confirmation that we were indeed dealing with extraordinary numbers of Little Gulls came on the evening of 12th September, when an unprecedented 10,000+ were recorded offshore from Spurn Bird Observatory on high-water spring tides, breaking all previous Yorkshire (and British) records of this species. Land-based observers of this remarkable gathering included P. Collins, A. A. Hutt, B. R. Spence, D. J. Standring and M. F. Stoyle. During the following three weeks, other exceptional counts in Yorkshire included 8,034 off Flamborough Head on 16th September (a Flamborough record), with 4,928 there on 28th September and 3,000 on 4th October. Farther afield, counts included 900 off Hartlepool, Cleveland, on 2nd October, with 3,893 passing there on 3rd and 1,500 off Tynemouth, Tyne & Wear, on 4th October.

The transect surveys which were carried out at sea, in conjunction with land-based observations from the Yorkshire coast, during and prior to 11th-12th September 2003, help to provide an insight into the occurrence and behaviour of these large gatherings of Little Gulls.

Observations at sea in September 2003

Our transect surveys were carried out at sea between 10.19 hrs and 16.23 hrs (all times in GMT) on 11th September, and 09.11 hrs and 17.17 hrs on 12th September. High water at Withernsea was 17.18 hrs and 17.49 hrs on 11th and 12th respectively, so that we started survey work each day around low water and finished as the tide was flooding. Our observations took place in relatively calm conditions, associated with a ridge of high pressure, with the breeze moving from force 4 to 0 on the Beaufort scale and shifting during the course of the two days from a northerly direction, through east, south and west, before ending in complete calm.

On both days, during early morning traverses along the coast southwards from Bridlington, we found good numbers of Arctic Skuas *Stercorarius parasiticus*, Kittiwakes and terns *Sterna* close inshore, but no Little Gulls. Little Gulls were first encountered at 10.26 hrs off Withernsea on 11th and last seen at 16.06 hrs off Skipsea on 12th. None was seen on the final transect of the second day to the northeast of Skipsea, nor were any seen within the innermost part of Bridlington Bay as we returned to the harbour on the evenings of 11th and 12th, suggesting that they were either roosting offshore, or to the south of our transect study area.

Feeding was observed throughout both days, often in a frenzy of activity with other seabird species, with the Little Gulls hovering above the waves and snatching items from the surface in a tern-like manner and also landing on the water

Table 1. Composition of feeding flocks recorded at sea off Yorkshire, 11th-12th September 2003, based on number of birds seen per kilometre of ship's transect.

	11th September	12th September	Mean number per km (grand total)
Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*	0.2	0.3	0.2 (12)
Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus*	0.0	0.1	0.1 (4)
Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*	0.1	0.3	0.2 (10)
Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*	1.4	0.9	1.1 (53)
Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*	0.3	0.5	0.4 (20)
Little Gull *Larus minutus*	29.8	44.6	38.3 (1,837)
Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*	0.4	0.1	0.3 (13)
Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*	80.2	72.3	75.7 (3,633)
Terns *Sterna*	1.8	6.0	4.2 (202)
Common Guillemot *Uria aalge*	54.2	80.7	69.3 (3,329)
Razorbill *Alca torda*	21.9	12.4	16.5 (792)
Puffin *Fratercula arctica*	2.5	4.0	3.3 (160)

to pick up prey. Occasionally, some were observed 'towering' into the air in tight-knit flocks to avoid the attention of Arctic Skuas. Water depths where the birds were located feeding ranged from 18 to 39 m. There was no commercial fishing activity in the vicinity at the time, and the availability of discards was not considered to be a factor influencing the distribution of Little Gulls.

Kittiwakes and Common Guillemots *Uria aalge* outnumbered Little Gulls within feeding flocks by a ratio of 1.9:1 and 1.4:1, respectively. Other species observed in good numbers included Sandwich Terns *S. sandvicensis*, Razorbills *Alca torda* and Puffins *Fratercula arctica*. Northern Gannets *Morus bassanus* and Arctic Skuas were also present, along with small numbers of Fulmars *Fulmarus glacialis*, Manx *Puffinus puffinus* and Sooty Shearwaters *P. griseus*, Great Black-backed Gulls *L. marinus* and 'commic terns' *S. hirundo/paradisaea* (table 1). The species composition of these flocks, with their predominance of fish-eaters (both surface-feeders and plunge-divers), and the manner in which the birds were concentrated in a series of discrete feeding flocks within a large but relatively narrow band that followed the line of the tidal currents south off Flamborough Head, suggests that the principle source of activity was the presence of surface-dwelling shoals of small fish (possibly first-year herring *Clupea*). In turn, the fish were presumably attracted by a temporary abundance of plankton, associated with the cold, well-mixed, nutrient-rich waters which penetrate southwards off the Yorkshire coast at this time of year to form a mid-shelf front with the warmer, stratified waters that occur closer inshore (Tasker *et al.* 1987). The ship's radar confirmed the presence of substantial shoals of fish in those areas where the birds were most heavily concentrated on both days of our survey, and there were also reports from local fishermen of a large shoal of fish some 0.8 km wide and 12 km long off Spurn on 12th (L. Degnan pers. comm.) Further evidence was provided by the presence of a number of immature Northern Gannets on the second day of our survey, which had gorged on fish to such an extent that they had extreme difficulty in rising from the water when approached by the ship.

Owing to the frenzied activity and the fact that the ship was steaming at a steady 8.5 knots, it was not possible to establish an accurate ratio of first-calendar-year to adult/second-year Little Gulls, but we consider that adult/second-year birds predominated to a large extent, possibly by as much as 90-95%.

Sightings of Little Gulls off the Yorkshire coast

The first large gathering of Little Gulls recorded off the Yorkshire coast was in autumn 1982, when 724 were seen some 2.5-3 km off Flamborough Head, in a long line and apparently feeding, during the late afternoon of 24th September (Dunn & Lassey 1985). This was followed by day-totals of 1,000 and 2,072 off Flamborough on 25th and 27th September, respectively. These records coincided with strong southeasterly winds, which Dunn & Lassey believed had pushed the birds west of their more normal Baltic coast migration route.

Since 1982, there have been other notable

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285. Little Gulls *Larus minutus*, Seaforth, Merseyside, April 2004.

sightings of Little Gulls by the Flamborough Ornithological Group. These include:

- 3,082 moving north off the Head on 26th October 1986, during a light northwesterly breeze;
- a heavy southerly movement between 16th and 19th October 1987, including a peak day-count of 4,002 on 17th, during a period of strong southwesterly winds that caused considerable storm damage across southern England;
- large numbers on various days between September and November 1989, with peak day-counts of over 1,000 on three occasions;
- an unusually large build-up of feeding birds in Bridlington Bay between late August and mid November 1995, including a peak day-count of 4,100 on 21st September;
- 3,619 off the Head on 25th October 1997 (and earlier that same year, over 3,000 were seen at Hornsea Mere between 31st August and 17th September).

The presence of these birds off the Yorkshire coast for increasingly protracted periods, the consistently high numbers involved, and the detection (in autumn 1995) of a diurnal pattern of movement in which birds were seen flying north off Flamborough Head for up to two and a half hours after dawn and back south during the last two hours of daylight, led to the conclusion that the gulls were roosting at sea some distance offshore and, consequently, some of the higher counts during late summer/autumn probably involved the same individuals (Lassey 1995). Counts during autumn 2003 of 8,034 off Flamborough Head on 16th September, 4,928 on 28th September and 3,000 on 4th October also suggested that birds were feeding and roosting offshore over a period of weeks, rather than actively migrating. This was backed up by the fact that all three of these peak counts occurred on days when only small numbers of Little Gulls were logged off Spurn Point (day-totals of four, 73 and nil, respectively), which is not consistent with a large migratory movement on the days in question.

Between 25th September and 2nd October 1982, a total of 993 Little Gulls seen off Flamborough and Filey were aged, of which 57.8% were classified as adult/second-year birds (Dunn & Lassey 1985). In 1995, the proportion of adults/second-years rose from 65% in September to a peak of 85% by the end of October (Lassey 1995). This compares with our estimates of 90-95% adults/second-years in the flocks observed on 11th-12th September 2003.

Tables 2 & 3 contain an analysis of the numbers of Little Gulls observed off Spurn Point on a monthly and weekly basis respectively, while fig. 2 combines maximum day-counts for Spurn during 2000-2003 to show the overall pattern of seasonal occurrence. Until

Table 2. Monthly maximum counts of Little Gulls *Larus minutus* at Spurn, East Yorkshire, 1998-2003. Source: Spurn Bird Observatory Trust.

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
January	0	0	21	0	3	11
February	0	0	0	0	0	0
March	0	0	0	0	9	0
April	15	4	4	0	1	27
May	4	2	8	30	26	2
June	1	1	6	4	1	3
July	5	31	60	66	76	191
August	4	8	185	11	259	2,000
September	75	98	35	219	443	10,000
October	65	105	1,400	900	580	769
November	75	262	43	56	14	29
December	0	3	34	1	3	0
Mean monthly maxima	20.3	42.8	149.7	107.3	117.9	1,086.0

Table 3. Maximum day-counts of Little Gulls *Larus minutus* at Spurn, East Yorkshire, for each seven-day period, July-November, 2000-2003. Source: Spurn Bird Observatory Trust.

Period beginning:	2000	2001	2002	2003
3rd July	11	75	1	3
10th July	6	61	2	178
17th July	5	14	76	147
24th July	60	6	69	191
31st July	1	3	259	2,000
7th August	0	1	19	315
14th August	3	11	15	1,650
21st August	5	3	9	57
28th August	185	7	3	77
4th September	8	8	27	151
11th September	35	5	217	10,000
18th September	7	219	443	2,609
25th September	51	4	78	1,500
2nd October	1,400	1	394	45
9th October	70	900	15	40
16th October	39	28	7	769
23rd October	197	83	580	8
30th October	94	36	10	29
6th November	43	56	14	3
13th November	0	56	4	13
20th November	13	1	1	0

2003, the highest count of Little Gulls on record was 1,400+ which came in off the sea during the late evening of 8th October 2000, mostly in groups of 50 to 100, but with some groups in the low hundreds. They spent about an hour bathing and resting on the mudflats in the Humber estuary before flying back out to sea at dusk, as mysteriously as they had arrived. This same pattern was repeated on a number of occasions during October 2000, although with much smaller numbers involved (Bell & Degnan 2001; L. Degnan, pers. comm.). The 8th October 2000 record, which at the time was considerably larger than all previous counts off Spurn Point, was broken on several occasions during 2003, with the maximum day-counts during five separate weeks in August and September 2003 each surpassing the October 2000 figure, including the remarkable gathering of 10,000+ during calm conditions on the evening of 12th September.

Observers at Spurn have confirmed that the large counts in August 2003 involved birds coming in at dusk to roost offshore, before flying back out to sea in a northeasterly direction early the following morning, within an hour or so of sunrise. The gulls involved in the huge gathering on 12th September 2003 came straight in off the sea in the late afternoon on flooding spring tides, typically in groups of 20-100, but soon merging to form larger parties. As they approached land, some settled and others generally milled about, the whole mass stretching along the coast. They gradually came closer inshore and were still present as darkness fell, off the northern limit of the Observatory. Next morning, none was to be seen, though large feeding flocks could be seen out towards the horizon with the aid of a telescope (L. Degnan, pers. comm.).

Wider context

Passage Little Gulls in Britain originate primarily from the Baltic and northwest Russia, the westernmost of three discrete breeding populations in the Western Palearctic. Ringing recoveries in Britain are limited, but support

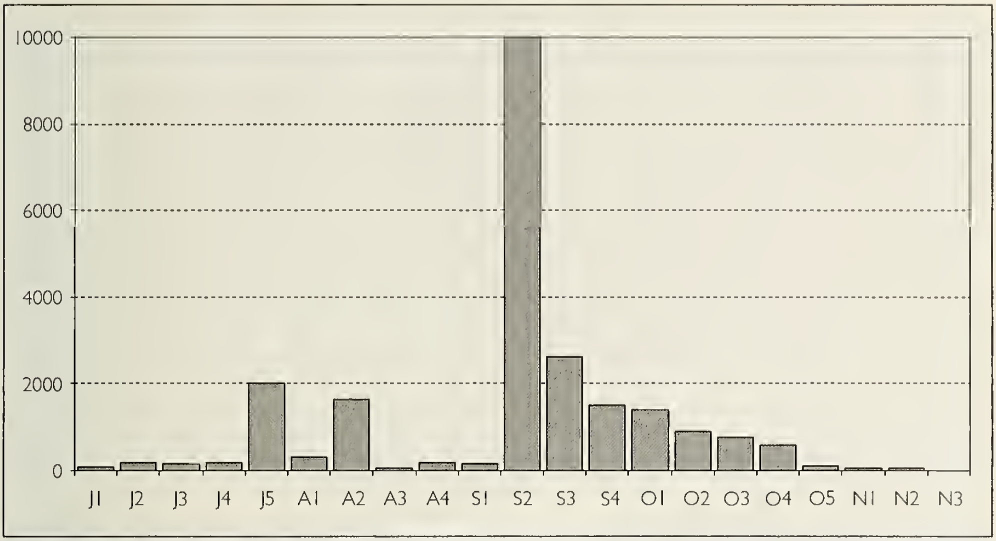

Fig. 2. Weekly maximum day-totals of Little Gulls *Larus minutus* off Spurn Point, East Yorkshire, between July and November, 2000-2003 (seven-day periods as defined in table 3). Source: Spurn Bird Observatory Trust.

this assumption, with seven recoveries from Finland, one from Norway and three from the Baltic States (Toms 2002). The total European breeding population is currently thought to be 23,000-32,000 pairs, almost half of which breed in Russia (Viksne & Bourne 1997). Hutchinson & Neath (1978) first postulated a stepped movement of birds away from their Baltic breeding grounds, with initial post-breeding dispersal to late-summer quarters in the Baltic Sea, the North Sea and (to a lesser extent) the Irish Sea in order to complete their moult, followed by a late-autumn movement to regular winter quarters from Britain south as far as the western Mediterranean and west African coast. This general pattern is consistent with the observed influx of Little Gulls along the eastern seaboard of Britain during late July and early August, with the majority leaving the North Sea, via the English Channel, in October and November (Oliver & Davenport 1971; Hutchinson & Neath 1978; Taylor *et al.* 1981). The timing of this exodus in 2003 is shown in table 4 by shore-based counts from Dungeness Bird Observatory, Kent, and le Clipon, Dunkirk, northern France; as usual, peak numbers were observed in October. A proportion of these birds make their way down the Atlantic Coast, but do not reach the western Mediterranean until December (Finlayson 1992). The size of this passage movement through British waters has increased dramatically since the early 1970s (Hutchinson & Neath 1978; Dunn & Lassey 1985; Smith 1987; Lassey 1995), which may be related to an expansion in the Finnish breeding population by more than 50% between 1970 and 1990 (Viksne & Bourne 1997).

Table 4. The movement of Little Gulls *Larus minutus* through the English Channel, showing numbers recorded at Dungeness, Kent, and at le Clipon, Dunkirk, northern France, during autumn 2003. Data are monthly totals. Source: Dungeness Bird Observatory Trust and Association le Clipon.

	Dungeness	le Clipon
July	38	18
August	24	35
September	111	871
October	135	2,548
November	6	1,070
December	2	731

Discussion

The pattern of occurrence in fig. 2 suggests that two waves of arrivals reach the Yorkshire coast, the first in late July/early August and a second, larger one, from mid September to late October. This overall pattern, which has been observed previously (Bruun 1968; Taylor *et al.* 1981; Smith 1987), was interpreted by Hutchinson & Neath (1978) to represent an initial post-breeding movement to sheltered sea areas for moult, followed by a more concerted dispersal to wintering quarters. The data presented here suggest a slightly more stepped movement through the North Sea, with the influx from the

Steve Young

286. Adult Little Gull *Larus minutus*, Seaforth, Merseyside, April 2004.

breeding colonies first apparent in July and early August, gradually augmented by further arrivals through to October, by which time a substantial proportion of the Baltic/Scandinavian breeding population is likely to be moving around the North Sea in search of food, sometimes in large gatherings, while post-breeding moult is completed. There appears to be a small overland movement to the Irish Sea, particularly among the first wave of arrivals (Smith 1987) but, in general, the majority appear to remain in the North Sea until late October/early November, when all except a small number of over-wintering birds leave the North Sea basin through the English Channel.

Some sources (e.g. Hutchinson & Neath 1978, Cramp & Simmons 1983) contend that Little Gull is not a truly pelagic seabird. Although Little Gulls may not wander the oceans to the extent of species such as Kittiwake or Sabine's Gull *L. sabini*, they are nevertheless well adapted to life offshore, and feed and roost at sea for a substantial part of the year. Little Gulls appear 'en-masse' within sight of the British coast relatively infrequently and usually stay close inshore for short periods only before returning to the open sea. Although these land-based sightings are often attributed to 'passage migrants', observations off the Yorkshire coast would suggest that many, particularly in the period between late July and early October, are probably involved in a general diurnal movement within the confines of the North Sea. These are birds which have temporarily interrupted their migration in order to moult, rather than birds which are actively migrating. The nature and location of these diurnal movements is clearly influenced by weather, tides and food availability, but the precise inter-relationships among these factors is not fully understood. While there are examples of large numbers of Little Gulls being pushed onshore by inclement weather, the unprecedented numbers off Spurn on 12th September 2003 appeared in completely calm weather. This was also the case with some of the large counts in the autumn of 1995 (Lassey 1995), and also with a 'feeding frenzy' of shearwaters reported off northwest Devon between 24th August and 10th September 2002 in similar circumstances (Darleston 2003). It is suggested that the combination of calm weather and flooding spring tides on the evening of 12th September helped to move Little Gulls, which had previously been foraging out at sea closer inshore to roost.

Birds foraging at sea often move in and out of sight from land, both during the course of a single day and from one day to the next, thereby introducing a strong possibility of double-counting by shore-based observers. Counts at sea can also be extremely difficult when dealing with feeding flocks of the size and extent that we encountered on 11th-12th September 2003. Nonetheless, by combining sea- and shore-based observations, as in this instance, it is possible to achieve a greater insight into the behaviour of these birds than by either one alone, and this has important implications for future surveys of other sensitive offshore sites.

Acknowledgments

Thanks are due to Peter Ullrich who partnered me on these surveys at sea, to Dr Steve Percival who supervised them, and to Powergen who funded them. I also gratefully acknowledge the assistance given by Spurn Bird Observatory, Flamborough Ornithological Group, Dungeness Bird Observatory and Association le Clipon, and in particular that of Lance Degnan, Geoff Dobbs, Verbanck Koen, Brett Richards and David Walker, for their comments and help in accessing unpublished data relating to recent occurrences of Little Gulls in the North Sea and the English Channel.

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287. Little Gull *Larus minutus*, Seaforth, Merseyside, May 2004.

Status and productivity of Peregrine Falcons in the Yorkshire Dales between 1978 and 2002

Ian R. Court, Paul V. Irving and Ian Carter

Steve McQueen

ABSTRACT This paper provides an analysis of Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* breeding data in the Yorkshire Dales between 1978 and 2002. The number of breeding pairs in the Dales has increased from a single pair in 1978 to a maximum of 15 occupied sites in 1993, but breeding productivity remains particularly low at some sites and the population is almost certainly well below its potential. The breeding data show that there is significant variation in Peregrine breeding success between nest sites, with those in areas managed for grouse shooting resulting in markedly fewer fledged young than sites away from grouse moors, on average. This difference is statistically significant and cannot be explained by any natural factors.

In the early 1970s, the Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* breeding population in the Yorkshire Dales was restricted to three or four traditional nesting sites, in the northwest of the old county of Yorkshire (Varty 1991). Administrative changes meant that this area was encompassed by the new county of Cumbria in 1974, and subsequent monitoring of these nest sites was undertaken by fieldworkers from the Cumbrian Trust for Nature Conservation. The first Peregrines to return to that part of the Dales which is now within the present county boundary of North Yorkshire bred in 1978 (Varty 1991).

In 1981, members of the Yorkshire Naturalists' Union (YNU) Protection of Birds Committee established the Yorkshire Dales Protection Group to co-ordinate Peregrine monitoring and survey work in the Dales (Varty 1991). Monitoring was carried out by a number of volunteers, while funding from the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, RSPB and English Nature enabled the employment of up to two wardens during the breeding season to monitor nesting attempts between 1981 and 1988. Since 1992, monitoring has been carried out by members of the Yorkshire Dales Protection Group, the Yorkshire Dales Upland Bird Study Group and a number of independent fieldworkers.

Despite an increase in Peregrine numbers in the Yorkshire Dales, observations reveal continued poor breeding success at a number of sites, and the Peregrine has been identified as a priority species in the local Biodiversity Action Plan for the Yorkshire Dales National Park, *Nature in the Dales* (Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority 2000). This paper fulfils two key requirements of the Species Action Plan: to collate Peregrine breeding data, and to identify those Peregrine nesting sites in the Dales which have repeated poor breeding success.

Methods

The study area referred to as the Yorkshire Dales covers that part of the North Pennines from Skipton north to the boundary with Co. Durham, and from the Cumbria/Lancashire boundary to the eastern Pennine fringes (approximately 2,150 km²), the majority of which is either within the Yorkshire Dales National Park or the Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The data on Peregrine breeding attempts in this area has been collated from confidential reports held by members of the YNU Protection of Birds Committee and Yorkshire Dales Upland Bird Study Group, with additional information provided by independent observers.

David Tipling/Windrush

288. Juvenile Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* feeding on Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus*, Yorkshire, February 1999.

David Tipling/Windrush

289. Juvenile Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*, Scotland, February 1999.

Although a systematic survey of the study area using a standardised methodology has not been undertaken, known Peregrine eyries have been monitored on a regular basis during the study period. New nest sites were located either by random visits to potentially suitable nesting sites or by following up reports of possible breeding attempts from various sources. One nest site (no. 3 in table 2) was wardened between 1981 and 1988, and limited funds were available to fund volunteers to monitor this and other sites for several subsequent years. All other fieldwork was carried out on a voluntary basis and, consequently, the number of sites checked each year has been dependent upon volunteer time and availability. No fieldwork was undertaken in 2001 because of access restrictions as a result of foot-and-mouth disease.

Fieldworkers made a number of visits to each site during the breeding season to determine site occupancy, evidence of breeding and the outcome of any breeding attempt. To avoid unnecessary disturbance, there was no attempt to visit all nests to confirm whether eggs had been laid or to determine clutch size. Owing to considerable variation in the accessibility of nest sites, some were viewable only from public rights of way, occasionally some distance away, while at other sites landowners granted permission for more detailed observations to be carried out.

Sites were described as occupied if at least one Peregrine was recorded at the nest site during the breeding season, and all occupied sites were classed as a breeding attempt. A female was considered to have laid eggs at any site where a parent bird was seen settling on the nest site and apparently incubating. If adults were seen bringing food to the nest, and it appeared that young were being fed, then a pair were assumed to have chicks. The number of fledged young at successful sites was recorded and, where possible, the cause and timing of any nest failures were identified. All known nesting attempts have been recorded on a nest-site basis, although, in some cases, it is likely that different nest sites formed part of a single Peregrine territory.

For the purposes of analysis, each Peregrine nest site was allocated to one of three categories: (i) within an area managed primarily for Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus*; (ii) within 2 km of land managed for Red Grouse; or (iii) more than 2 km from land managed for Red Grouse.

Results

The number of breeding Peregrines in the Yorkshire Dales increased from a single successful pair in 1978 to a maximum of 15 occupied sites in 1993, from which young were fledged successfully in ten cases. Although the number of occupied sites subsequently declined, there was also a reduction in the number of sites monitored, and the variability of monitoring effort between 1993 and 2002 makes it difficult to establish the overall population trend during this period. It should be noted that observer

Table 1. Details of Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* nest sites monitored in the Yorkshire Dales, 1978-2002.

Year	No. sites checked	No. sites occupied	No. successful sites	Total no. fledged young	Mean no. fledged young per occupied territory	Mean no. fledged young per successful attempt
1978	1	1	1	4	4	4.00
1979	1	1	0	0	–	–
1980	5	4	3	6	1.50	2.00
1981	6	6	3	8	1.33	2.67
1982	9	9	4	11	1.22	2.75
1983	8	6	3	6	1.00	2.00
1984	10	10	5	18	1.80	3.60
1985	10	8	5	10	1.25	2.00
1986	10	9	2	4	0.44	2.00
1987	10	10	5	15	1.50	3.00
1988	11	10	4	9	0.90	2.25
1989	7	7	4	15	2.14	3.75
1990	14	13	5	14	1.08	2.80
1991	13	11	8	21	1.91	2.63
1992	13	12	7	16	1.33	2.29
1993	19	15	10	16	1.07	1.60
1994	18	14	10	27	1.93	2.70
1995	17	13	8	22	1.69	2.75
1996	15	10	9	21	2.10	2.33
1997	13	10	5	10	1.00	2.00
1998	14	8	4	12	1.50	3.00
1999	7	6	3	9	1.50	3.00
2000	5	5	2	7	1.40	3.50
2001				No data available		
2002	11	8	4	9	1.13	2.25

Table 2. Recorded clutch size of Peregrine Falcons *Falco peregrinus* in the Yorkshire Dales, 1978-2002.

Clutch size	1	2	3	4	5
No. clutches	3	5	11	11	2

effort has been more concentrated in the south of the study area and it is possible that there has been some under-recording of nesting attempts in the north, especially during the latter part of the study period.

Between 1978 and 2002, a total of 206 occupied Peregrine nest sites were recorded in the Yorkshire Dales. Of these, 114 (55.3%) were successful, while 92 (44.7%) failed to fledge any young. In total, 290 fledged young were recorded, with a mean of 1.41 fledged young per occupied territory and 2.54 fledged young per successful nesting attempt. A summary of the annual breeding data is presented in table 1; mean clutch size was found to be 3.13 eggs per nesting attempt (n=32 nests; table 2). Data for the 26 sites where Peregrine nesting attempts were recorded are given in table 3. Observations suggest that the 26 different nest sites involved 19 separate breeding territories.

On land managed for Red Grouse, young were successfully fledged from 34% of occupied Peregrine nest sites, with a mean of 0.68 young per occupied nest site, and 2.00 young per successful nesting attempt. On land within 2 km of managed grouse moor, young fledged from 44% of occupied sites, with a mean of 1.14 young per occupied site, and 2.60 young per successful site. Finally, on land more than 2 km from managed grouse moor, young fledged from 76% of occupied sites, with a mean of 2.07 young per occupied site, and 2.73 young per successful site. These data thus show that occupied nest sites more than 2 km away from grouse moors produce, on average, 1.39 *more* young each year than sites on grouse moors, and this difference is statistically significant (U=14; P<0.05, Mann-Whitney U-test). The mean number of young fledged per *successful* breeding attempt on grouse moors (mean 2.00) was not significantly different from the number fledged per successful attempt away from grouse moors (mean 2.62; t-test, P>0.05). This

Table 3. Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* breeding data from for each nest site in the Yorkshire Dales, 1978-2002.

Site no.	No. years site checked	No. years site occupied	No. times site successful (%)	No. young fledged	Mean no. young fledged per occupied territory	Mean no. young fledged per successful attempt
			Nest sites on managed grouse moor			
7	11	11	1 (9)	3	0.27	3.0
9	22	22	12 (55)	24	1.09	2.0
15	9	8	2 (25)	2	0.25	1.0
16	1	1	0 (0)	0	–	–
17	3	3	0 (0)	0	–	–
18	9	5	2 (40)	4	0.80	2.0
19	5	2	1 (50)	1	0.50	1.0
20	19	13	6 (46)	12	0.92	2.0
22	2	2	2 (100)	6	3.00	3.0
24	12	8	0 (0)	0	–	–
25	2	1	0 (0)	0	–	–
Totals	95	76	26 (34)	52	0.68	2.00
			Nest sites within 2 km of managed grouse moor			
2	10	9	8 (89)	23	2.56	2.9
8	19	17	6 (35)	13	0.76	2.2
21	5	5	1 (20)	3	0.60	3.0
23	3	3	0 (0)	0	–	–
Totals	37	34	15 (44)	39	1.14	2.60
			Nest sites more than 2 km from managed grouse moor			
1	6	3	1 (33)	3	1.00	3.0
3	22	22	14 (64)	44	2.00	3.1
4	18	12	10 (83)	27	2.25	2.7
5	9	4	1 (25)	3	0.75	3.0
6	17	17	15 (88)	39	2.29	2.6
10	7	7	6 (86)	22	3.14	3.7
11	7	6	4 (67)	8	1.33	2.0
12	2	2	2 (100)	4	2.00	2.0
13	10	7	6 (86)	16	2.29	2.7
14	13	13	11 (85)	29	2.23	2.6
26	4	3	3 (100)	4	1.33	1.3
Totals	115	96	73 (76)	199	2.07	2.73

suggests that there is no evidence that grouse moors represent intrinsically poor habitat for Peregrines, which might lead to less successful breeding attempts.

Discussion

The mean of 1.41 fledged young per occupied territory (n=206) for the Yorkshire Dales is comparable with a mean of 1.31 young per range-holding pair (n=1,924) recorded in Cumbria between 1966 and 1999 (Horne & Fielding 2002), though it should be noted that the Cumbrian totals have been adjusted to exclude the effects of intentional disturbance. Furthermore, the mean number of 2.54 young fledged per successful site in the Yorkshire Dales (n=114) compares with 2.41 young from successful nest sites in Cumbria (n=1,042) while, from the limited data available, mean clutch size in the Yorkshire Dales (3.13, n=32) compares with a national mean of 3.63 (Ratcliffe 1999).

The data for the Yorkshire Dales show that there are considerable differences in average breeding productivity among nest sites. Ratcliffe (1999) identified a number of factors that can influence the breeding success of Peregrines, chiefly poor weather, natural predation and human interference. Fieldworkers in the Yorkshire Dales attributed a number of nest failures in 1984, 1986 and 2002 to poor weather

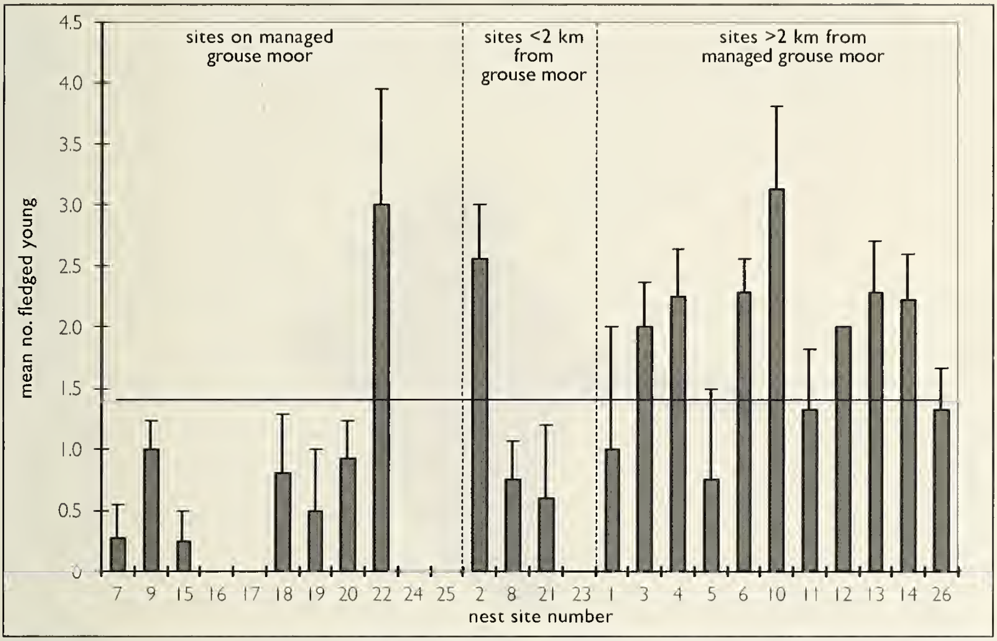

Fig. 1. The mean number of young fledged (± standard error) per occupied Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* territory in the Yorkshire Dales, 1978-2002, in relation to distance from moors managed for Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus*. Horizontal line shows mean no. fledged for all sites.

conditions, while Ratcliffe suggested that 1981 was a particularly poor breeding season nationally, owing to cold weather in April and wet weather in May. The potential for predation of Peregrine nests and chicks by Red Foxes *Vulpes vulpes* and mustelids is generally very low, owing to the inaccessibility of most nests, but there may be a slightly increased risk of predation at smaller cliff sites (Ratcliffe 1999). Certain nest sites in the Yorkshire Dales are susceptible to disturbance from rock climbers. The level of disturbance will depend on the distance between the climbers and the nest site, and the length of time climbers spend on the cliff (Rat-

Howard Nicholls/Windrush

290. Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* at nest site with chick, Wales, June, year unknown.

George Reszeter

291. Juvenile Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*, St Martin's, Scilly, October, year unknown.

cliffe 1991). Nevertheless, there has been close and successful co-operation between the British Mountaineering Council, the YNU Protection of Birds Committee and the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority to implement seasonal climbing restrictions at three Peregrine nest sites to prevent any unintentional disturbance by climbers during the breeding season.

Although it is extremely difficult to quantify, experienced fieldworkers attributed a minimum of 28 nest failures (13% of nesting attempts) to deliberate human interference during this study. This includes the disappearance of parent birds during incubation or chick rearing and the suspected robbery of eggs or chicks. In Cumbria, Horne & Fielding (2002) found that in the worst years '10% of examined ranges experienced some form of human disturbance'. There were two confirmed cases of persecution at Peregrine nest sites in the Yorkshire Dales during the study period. At one site, the incubating female was found shot dead on the nest, while at another site two chicks died on the nesting ledge – one chick was retrieved and found to have been poisoned with alpha-chlorolose. At the latter site, a gamekeeper was successfully prosecuted in 1985 for shooting a juvenile Peregrine two weeks after it had fledged. There were also two confirmed cases of clutches of Peregrine eggs being robbed; one clutch was stolen and replaced with Common Kestrel *F. tinnunculus* eggs while another was replaced with a clutch of domestic hens eggs. On a further occasion, a metal climbing stake was found above a nest site between visits, and the chicks had disappeared by the second visit.

A number of studies in Scotland have shown that the breeding success of Peregrines on or near land managed for Red Grouse was lower than at sites not managed for Red Grouse (e.g. Anon. 2000, Hardey *et al.* 2003). In the Yorkshire Dales, five of the six sites where there is consistent long-term poor breeding success are on land managed primarily for Red Grouse, and the sixth is on land adjacent to a grouse moor. Overall, the average productivity for Peregrine nesting attempts on grouse moors was only 0.68, compared with 2.07 for nests at least 2 km away from grouse moors, a marked difference which is statistically significant (see above).

Hardey *et al.* (2003) suggested that the lower breeding success of Peregrines nesting on grouse moors in Scotland was linked to increased levels of persecution. In the Yorkshire

Dales, the remoteness of many nest sites meant that it was difficult to obtain conclusive proof of human interference, although several incidents of illegal persecution were confirmed. Our data analysis has failed to identify any natural factors that could selectively reduce productivity at Peregrine sites on or close to managed grouse moors. Indeed, in the relatively small number of cases where nests on grouse moors were successful, a healthy average of 2.0 young fledged per successful nesting attempt. This confirms that the natural habitat available to pairs on grouse moor is perfectly suitable for rearing young.

What is the future for Peregrines in the Yorkshire Dales? The number of 'first-class' (see Ratcliffe 1980) Peregrine nesting sites within the Dales is limited, with the majority of these sites already occupied by Peregrines. There are, however, numerous small crags which, in the absence of human interference, could support breeding Peregrines, although Ratcliffe (1999) concluded that for such sites there is a greater risk of disturbance the closer they are to human dwellings or vehicle access routes.

While a future increase in the Peregrine population might be limited by food availability, Ratcliffe (1999) states that there is sufficient food supply across the country for a substantial increase in the Peregrine population and we believe that this is currently true for the Yorkshire Dales. There are plenty of sites in the Dales which appear eminently suitable for Peregrines but where birds suffer from consistently poor breeding success or are absent entirely. The issues associated with low productivity at nest sites on or adjacent to moors managed for grouse shooting need to be addressed urgently if the Peregrine population is to reach its natural carrying capacity in the Yorkshire Dales, particularly as there appears to be no natural cause for this low productivity.

Acknowledgments

This paper has been possible only because of the dedication of many fieldworkers who have spent countless hours monitoring Peregrines and their eyries; in particular the late Clive Varty, Doug Simpson, Stuart Brocklehurst and David Urwin. We would also like to thank other past and present members of the YNU Protection of Birds Committee and Yorkshire Dales Upland Bird Study Group, who have provided information, and a number of landowners who have allowed them access for monitoring.

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Looking back

Fifty years ago:

'Hobby in Essex in winter.—A Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*), thought to be a female, was seen on several occasions between November 6th, 1953, and January 2nd, 1954, by Mr. B. Winchester at the Layer Breton end of Abberton Reservoir, Essex. On December 21st it was also seen by Messrs. P. J. Fenning and R. King. Close views were obtained and a full description has already appeared in *The Essex Bird Report* for 1953. This appears to be the first record of a Hobby wintering in Britain. G. A. Pyman. [It should be remembered how remarkably mild was the weather throughout November and in the first half of December, 1953, so much so that there were a number of records of nests of certain species towards the end of this time (*Brit. Birds* 47: 95) and grass was growing to the end of the year.—Eds.]' (*Brit. Birds* 47: 308, September 1954)

The diet of seed-eating birds on lowland farmland

Robert A. Robinson

Simon Gillings

ABSTRACT The diet of Sky Larks *Alauda arvensis*, Yellowhammers *Emberiza citrinella* and Corn Buntings *E. calandra* on arable farmland in north Norfolk was examined by identifying the remains found in faecal pellets. Winter diet was dominated by cereal grains and a few common weed species, in proportion to their availability and size. Cereal leaf was prevalent in areas where seeds were scarce. Changes in farming practices have led to a sharp decline in seed availability in recent decades, but the reduction of cereal grain is probably the most important aspect for farmland passerines, since these grains are high in energy and highly profitable to feed on.

Clarke *et al.* (2003) rightly drew attention to the paucity of recent studies on the diet of seed-eating birds, in particular of farmland passerines. Their paper was based on the analysis of remains found in Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* pellets, and they concluded that arable weeds are of critical importance in the diet of birds foraging on open farmland. While the use of raptor pellets is undoubtedly valuable in determining broad dietary composition, it also hides much detail. Here, I present some data on the diet of Sky Larks *Alauda arvensis*, Yellowhammers *Emberiza citrinella* and Corn Buntings *E. calandra* using a quantitative method to characterize the remains found in faecal pellets, which is a good indicator of material consumed (Green 1978; Eybert & Constant 1992).

Methods

As part of a wider study into the foraging ecology of seed-eating passerines on arable farmland (Robinson 1997), I collected faecal pellets from foraging Sky Larks, Yellowhammers and Corn Buntings during the winter of 1995/96. The study was carried in north Norfolk, centred around Choseley Farm (TF 7541), an area of arable farming on light greensand soils; the primary crops are winter wheat and sugar beet. Samples were collected from two typical fields, a cereal stubble and a field under winter wheat, though the buntings foraged primarily on an area of spilt cereal grain in front of some drying barns adjacent to the cereal field. Pellets were stored in alcohol until they were analysed.

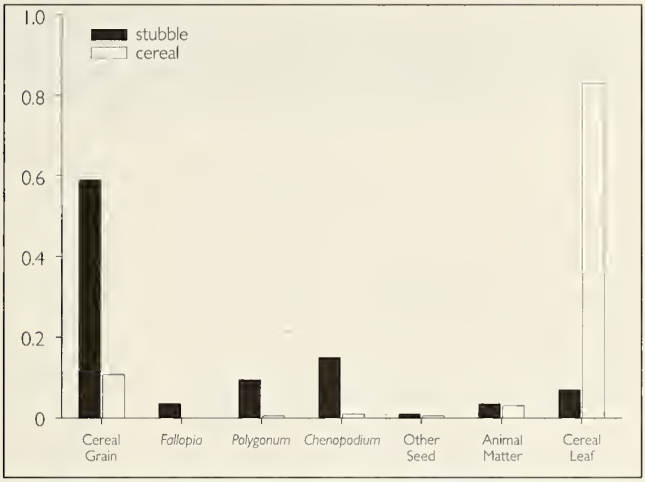

Fig. 1. The proportion of different dietary components in the diet of Sky Larks *Alauda arvensis* foraging in winter cereal and cereal stubble fields. Data from north Norfolk, winter 1995/96 (from Robinson 1997).

For analysis, each pellet was broken up in 3 ml of water and the content determined using a point-quadrat method with a 50 × binocular microscope. For each sample, 0.1 ml of the suspension was pippetted into a shallow-welled microscope slide. This was then placed over a grid of 72 points (which filled the field of view) and the identity of items falling on each grid point was determined, a procedure which usually yielded 10-20 'hits'. This procedure was then repeated five times for randomly selected, non-overlapping areas of the slide, giving a total of 360 grid positions counted for each sample. Such a method provides a relatively unbiased way of counting fragmented remains of seeds (some of which may be more more fragmentary than others). Seeds were identified on the basis of surface morphology using a reference collection and the photographs in Flood & Gates (1986). Only cuticular material was counted (i.e. seed endosperm, animal flesh and grit were ignored) and cereal leaves, other vegetation and invertebrates (mostly beetle elytra) were not identified further. To allow for different relative residue levels in the pellets, correction factors were applied to the proportions obtained, following Green (1978).

Results

The winter diet of passerines in the study area was dominated by just a few weed species; only seeds of Fat-hen *Chenopodium album*, Knotgrass *Polygonum aviculare*, Black-bindweed *Fallopia convolvulus* and Common Chickweed *Stellaria media* were found in any quantity, together with grains of cereal and leaves of young cereal seedlings (table 1). The preponderance of grain in the buntings' diet reflects their foraging on a patch of spilt grain adjacent to one of the fields. On stubbles, Sky Larks were extremely efficient at finding cereal grain, and it was far more prevalent in their diet than on the field of winter wheat (fig. 1); they were never observed to forage on the spilt grain. The diet of Sky Larks depended on their foraging location, however; on stubbles, they fed primarily on cereal grains and weed seeds, while on cereal fields they fed largely on the leaves of young cereal plants. Cereal vegetation was available in both fields in abundance (there was much volunteer cereal, at various stages, among the stubble), but seeds were generally much commoner on stubble (2,895/m^2) than on land with growing cereal (340/m^2). In situations where they had a choice of feeding on seeds or vegetation, seeds (particularly cereal grain) seemed to be preferred.

A large range of seed species (36) were recorded in the soil in the study fields (although this probably represents a depauperate flora in historical terms), but most were recorded in small numbers (table 1). The abundance of seeds in the field was a good indicator of dietary presence, although seeds from species such as mayweeds *Matricaria* and other composites, which are rather ephemeral, together with species with smaller seeds, such as meadowgrasses *Poa* and violets *Viola*, were under-represented. The fact that the dietary remains generally reflected the commonest species with the largest seeds sug-

Table 1. The occurrence of seeds in cereal and stubble fields, and in the diet of Sky Larks *Alauda arvensis*, Yellowhammers *Emberiza citrinella* and Corn Buntings *E. calandra*. Unless stated, data are percentages, and refer to the percentage of seed matter (i.e. other dietary items are excluded). Data from north Norfolk, winter 1995/96 (from Robinson 1997).

	Mean dry weight of seed (mg)	Field Cereal	Field Stubble	Sky Lark Cereal	Sky Lark Stubble	Yellowhammer	Corn Bunting
Cereal grain	15	<1	1	78	64	97	98
Fat-hen *Chenopodium album*	1.5	73	38	8	16	<1	<1
Knotgrass *Polygonum aviculare*	1.4	8	41	5	11	2	0
Black-bindweed *Fallopia convolvulus*	1.3	6	2	0	4	0	0
Dock spp. *Rumex*	1.3	0	1	0	1	0	0
Violet spp. *Viola*	1.0	6	1	0	0	0	0
Common Chickweed *Stellaria media*	0.4	6	1	0	2	<1	0
Sedge spp. *Carex*	0.4	0	5	0	0	0	0
Meadow-grass spp. *Poa*	0.3	0	7	0	0	<1	<1
Veronica spp. *Veronica*	0.3	1	1	0	1	0	0
Mayweed spp. *Matricaria*	0.1	0	2	0	0	0	0
Other seeds	–	<1	<1	8	<1	1	<1

gests that birds forage for seeds roughly in proportion to their abundance and energy value. All species foraged preferentially on cereal grain. Seeds of the weed species taken typically weighed in the order of 1-5 mg, whereas cereal grains were much larger (around 20 mg; Robinson 1997). The energy content of weed seeds is around 20 kJ/g, whereas that of wheat is around 15 kJ/g. Consequently, the energy content of wheat seeds (c. 300 J) was much greater than that of weed seeds (c. 20-100 J).

Discussion

These results support those of Clarke *et al.* (2003) who examined dietary components of seed-eaters in a similar geographical area. It should be noted, however, that these results may not be applicable elsewhere. For example, Green (1978) recorded a very high apparent preference for hemp-nettle *Galeopsis* seeds among Sky Larks, and Russian studies have revealed that pigweed *Amaranthus* is predominant in Sky Lark diet (Cramp 1985); these results reflect the local flora, and neither *Galeopsis* or *Amaranthus* were found in this study area. Indeed, Donald *et al.* (2001) even found seeds to be relatively unimportant in determining the distribution of Sky Larks. Yellowhammers and Corn Buntings are reputed to forage almost exclusively on cereal grain (Snow & Perrins 1998), but, as these results show, this is not strictly the case.

The number of weed seeds found in arable soil has declined by an order of magnitude in the last few decades, reducing foraging opportunities (Robinson & Sutherland 2002). Probably more important, though, has been a reduction in the amount of available grain. Mechanisation has increased the efficiency with which grain is harvested, stored and handled; harvesting loss rates of around 1-2% were tolerated in the early 1970s (NIAE 1972), whereas loss rates of more than 0.2% are considered unacceptable nowadays (Pearce 1992). Although this difference may seem small, it represents a substantial reduction in the number of grains available in a cereal field. The tendency to harvest crops as early as possible and cultivate the land immediately for a planting of winter crops will have exacerbated the overall situation. Grain is no longer stored on the field after harvesting, and stackyards have all but disappeared (Shrubb 1997). Tighter regulations concerning storage hygiene will also have played a role, by denying birds access to grain stores. Finally, more 'industrialised' animal rearing, and the separation of cereal and animal farming, means that many birds will no longer be able to forage around feed stations, as was the case in the past.

The spatial pattern of seed resources has also changed over time. Across most of the available habitat, seed density levels will be very low, with a few 'patches' of high density, often unintentionally, where grain has been spilt, or a field has been poorly harvested owing to (for example) adverse weather or ground conditions. These scattered patches are likely to be of critical importance to birds, particularly during periods of severe weather, when thousands of birds may congregate (Robinson & Sutherland 1999). Further intensification of agricultural practices may reduce the frequency of these high-density patches, with serious consequences for bird populations, although this will depend on a range of social and economic factors (Watkinson *et al.* 2000).

The observed reduction in amount of cereal grain now means that birds may be under severe stress to meet daily energy budgets, whereas in the past they could have met them comfortably (Robinson 2001). This is likely to be particularly important during periods of severe weather late in the winter when already meagre food sources are likely to be depleted and mortality may be expected to be especially high. Indeed, the recent run of relatively mild winters may have provided some ‘breathing space’ for our seed-eating passerines, and may account for some of the stabilisation in trends observed recently (Crick *et al.* 2004).

In conclusion, although the diet of seed-eating birds on farmland can be broadly characterised, it is highly dependent on local seed availability and can vary markedly, even between adjacent fields. All seeds are not equal, and those with the highest energy content are the most profitable to feed on. Although there has been a huge decline in seed numbers in recent decades, a reduction in the amount of cereal grain available on fields may have had most impact on birds since this has higher energy content and is seemingly much preferred.

Acknowledgments

I thank the land-owners for allowing me to trample over, and remove, bits of their fields, Leasa Sharpe for help in the field, and Bill Sutherland and Jenny Gill for much useful discussion. The work was funded as part of a BBSRC PhD studentship.

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Looking back

Fifty years ago:

Yellow-browed Warbler on Great Saltee, Co. Wexford.—On October 12th, 1953, a Yellow-browed Warbler (*Phylloscopus inornatus*) was seen and trapped by John Weaving on Great Saltee, Co. Wexford. In the field the small size, prominent eye-stripe and double wing-bars were noted. ROBERT F. RUTTLEDGE. [Major Ruttledge has sent us a full copy of the description taken down from the bird in the hand. This is the third Irish record of this species. One was recorded on Great Saltee in the previous autumn (*Brit. Birds* 46: 435).—EDS.]' (*Brit. Birds* 47: 314, September 1954)

Notes

Late summer seabird mortality on South Moray beaches

During past Seabird Group/RSPB Beached Bird Surveys in the 1960s and 1970s (annual reports of which were published in *Birds* magazine), dead seabirds were usually commonest on British beaches in the late winter. There were few casualties at other seasons, unless there had been exceptional mortality (more than ten birds per kilometre) as a result of factors such as bad weather, disease or pollution. There had been few at any time in Northeast Scotland recently, until, on 19th September 2002, after a period of light northerly winds, Wendy Glen informed me that dead auks were to be seen on Cullen Beach, Morayshire. Upon examining the few beaches on this rocky coast I was surprised to find 75 dead birds, mainly fresh young Common Guillemots *Uria aalge* (table 1). Most appeared to have crawled up and died among the rocks, though one was still alive on the tideline and one youngster, calling from a rock offshore, was still attended by an adult on the water. Fifty-four were also found at Lossiemouth in September 2002, including a chick ringed on Fair Isle, Shetland, on 3rd June (*Birds in Moray & Nairn*, 2002).

Table 1. Dead seabirds (adult/immature, where ageing possible) found on Moray beaches during August-October. Common Guillemots aged as during the 1967 *Torrey Canyon* surveys (*Nature* 215: 1123-1125).

	2002	2003
km examined	3.5	5.5
Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*	4/3	0/1
Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*	0/1	0/1
Common Gull *Larus canus*	2/4	7/13
Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*	1/2	4/13
Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*	0/1	3/2
Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*	1/3	4/9
Common Guillemot *Uria aalge*	70 (3/62)	12 (0/7)
Razorbill *Alca torda*	4	–
Black Guillemot *Cepphus grylle*	–	1
Puffin *Fratercula arctica*	1	–
Birds/km	28	13

It was not entirely clear how unusual such findings were on this coast, site of reports of beached birds by Thomas Edward in the nineteenth century (*Life of a Scotch Naturalist*, 1876, John Murray, London), so judgement was suspended until the following year. In 2003, a smaller number of fresh young Guillemots was again found, together with a larger number of mostly long-dead and mainly immature gulls *Larus* (table 1), so it seems worth reporting. The cause is presumably two poor breeding seasons, not only along the coast (*Seabird Group Newsletters* 92, 95), but in the huge Common Gull *L. canus* colonies inland. Extremely poor productivity in the latter was a result of the two usual causes in 2003, namely storms during the incubation period, followed by drought. It is notable that there was also mortality of Fulmars *Fulmarus glacialis*, which may have come from this area, in the southern North Sea in winter 2003/04 (J. A. van Franeker, *Brit. Birds* 97: 247-248). It would appear that the impact of such events may extend far beyond poor fledging success.

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Beached bird surveys - a comment

Bill Bourne's note (above) on unusual numbers of dead seabirds on beaches in the Moray Firth in autumn 2002 and 2003 highlights several issues. One is that standardised Beached Bird Surveys (BBS) are capable of monitoring, or at least putting into some quantitative and temporal context, seabird mortality which is unrelated to oil pollution, in addition to that which is oil-related. The Shetland BBS also recorded relatively high numbers of juvenile Common Guillemots *Uria aalge* in September of both 2002 and 2003 (fig. 1). Even allowing for variation in wind direction, wind speed and deposition rates between years, the pattern of mortality in 2002 and 2003 clearly differed from those of 1994 and 1995. In a 'normal' year, most Common Guillemots fledging from Shetland colonies cross the North Sea with their male parent and arrive off the coast of southwest Norway within a few weeks. The breeding season for Common Guillemots in Shetland in 2003 was extremely poor, with late laying, low colony attendance by off-duty and non-breeding adults, low chick weights and low breeding success (Heubeck 2004). In contrast, the breeding seasons of 1994 and 1995 were successful, both for Common Guillemots and other monitored seabird species. Here, I assume that an increased number of dead juvenile Common Guillemots on Shetland beaches in September after a poor breeding season means that the body condition of many young and their parents was simply not sufficient for them to make the North Sea crossing. Anecdotal observations, such as those of Bill Bourne's, and data from standardised BBS can provide clues to the extent of post-fledging mortality, which otherwise could be estimated only in the future from analyses of recoveries from ringed populations (where they exist).

Unfortunately, and in contrast to some other countries bordering the North Sea, BBS in the UK are presently confined to a survey organised by the RSPB at the end of February each year (with the exception of monthly year-round surveys in Orkney and Shetland). This February survey, which in 2003 involved c.700 volunteers walking 2,400 km of coastline, provides only a snapshot of mortality and its possible causes at one stage of the winter. Autumn and early winter mortality goes unrecorded, as does that in March and April.

BBS data from The Netherlands have demonstrated a significant decline in oiling rates of dead birds over a 20-year period (Camphuysen 1998), which suggests a reduction in chronic oil pollution in the southern North Sea at least. At the 5th International Conference on the Protection of the North Sea (Bergen, 2002), Ministers agreed to use the oiling rate of Common Guillemots washed ashore around the North Sea as an Ecological Quality Objective (EQO) to monitor the effectiveness of measures taken to reduce illegal discharges of oil from shipping. A target of 10% or less of the total of Common Guillemots found dead or dying on beaches being oiled, in all areas of the North Sea, was set (Camphuysen 2003). However, data from Shetland show that the monthly oiling rate can fluctuate greatly throughout the winter, and the reliance on a 'snapshot' value taken at the end of just one month may give a misleading impression, or fail to detect a real trend (table 1).

Apart from obtaining a more comprehensive and robust data set, there are additional benefits in maintaining a frequent and standardised BBS. Participants become more skilled in identifying and ageing corpses, and consequently they become of greater value during emergency surveys, for example during large-scale oiling incidents. Ringing recoveries undoubtedly increase if beaches are searched and corpses checked regularly, and a greater pool of corpses becomes available for other scientific studies. Data analysis and publication of results in an internationally accessible journal is, however, essential, and this is certainly one area where there is considerable scope for improvement in the UK. Such reporting should also extend to abnormal incidents of seabird mortality. While large-scale tanker accidents, such as those involving the *Braer* in Shetland in January 1993 and the *Sea Empress* in Pembrokeshire in February 1996, attract much attention, other incidents go unreported even though data have been gathered.

A case in point occurred in southeast England in late November and early December 2002, when 707 oiled seabirds were found in Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk and Lincolnshire during a three-week period, including 145 (21%) not identified to species or species group. Of the

Table 1. Data on intact Common Guillemots *Uria aalge* found on monthly beached bird surveys in Shetland during the winters 1995/96 to 2002/03 (October-April inclusive). Data show the overall percentage oiled, the monthly range of percentage oiled, total sample size for the winter, and the equivalent values for the February survey alone.

	Total % oiled, October-April	Monthly range	n	% oiled February	n
1995/96	29.5%	0-63%	660	28.4%	218
1996/97	20.2%	8-57%	109	8.3%	36
1997/98	18.3%	2-42%	208	11.6%	43
1998/99	8.3%	0-44%	204	0	44
1999/00	15.7%	0-100%	134	2.1%	48
2000/01	3.2%	0-40%	185	0	27
2001/02	3.1%	0-13%	160	13.3%	15
2002/03	3.4%	0-8%	409	3.0%	164

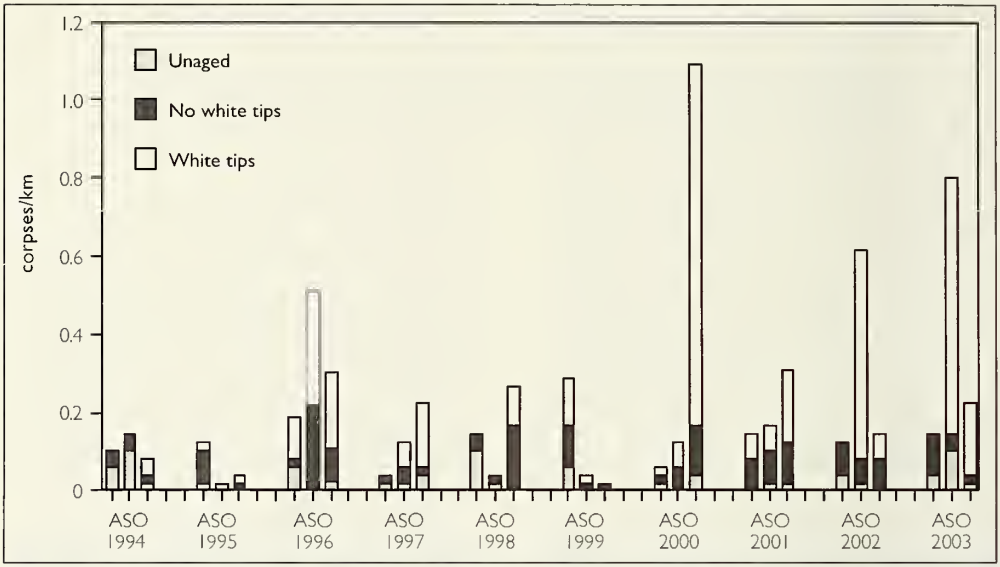

Fig. 1. The occurrence of dead Common Guillemots *Uria aalge* on standard monthly surveys of beaches in Shetland during the months of August, September and October (ASO), 1994-2003. Birds were recorded as having white tips or fringes to the greater underwing-coverts (almost certainly juvenile/first-winter), all-grey greater underwing-coverts (older), or were left unaged.

identified total, no fewer than 99 (18%) were Red-throated Divers *Gavia stellata*, while a further 15 oiled Red-throated Divers were found in northeast England at the same time (RSPB, unpubl.). This compares with only 19 divers of all species (13 oiled) found on the February 2003 BBS throughout the UK, and must be one of the largest kills of this species from oil pollution in the country in recent years. In a spreadsheet provided by RSPB, there are hints that numbers of oiled beached birds may have been considerably more than were recorded. For example, 31 dead Red-throated Divers were apparently found on the stretch of north Norfolk coast between Cley and Blakeney on 7th December 2002 (12 days after oiled birds were first noted coming ashore in Suffolk), yet no other oiled birds were recorded for that section of coast on that date, and there is no record of any other search of this coast. At present, I am unaware of any details of this incident being publicly available and, without a proper report, including an assessment of search effort, one can only guess at the scale of the actual mortality of Red-throated Divers, a species on the Amber List of *Birds of Conservation Concern* (Gregory *et al.* 2002).

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Calls of Manx Shearwaters at sea

On 24th August 2003, I was on board a yacht, approximately 5 km off St Johns Point, Co. Down (54°13'N, 05°34'W). The engine was off and we were moving by sail at this point, when we passed through a flock of approximately 1,000 Manx Shearwaters *Puffinus puffinus* on the water. The shearwaters were making loud, whistling calls, which were quite different to those I am familiar with at night, at their breeding colonies on Copeland, when the adults are coming in to feed the chicks. At first I thought that there must have been another species on the water, but I am certain that only Manx Shearwaters were present. Although it is possible that some were agitated by the close proximity of the boat, my impression was that the birds were calling among themselves, and that these calls were not stimulated by our presence. *BWP* states that this species is mostly silent at sea, or makes calls similar to those when ashore.

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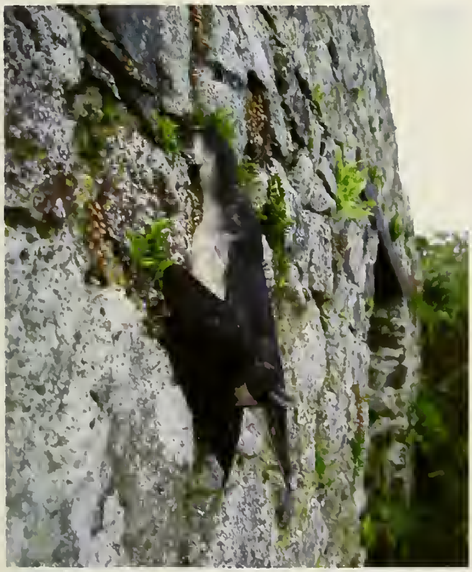
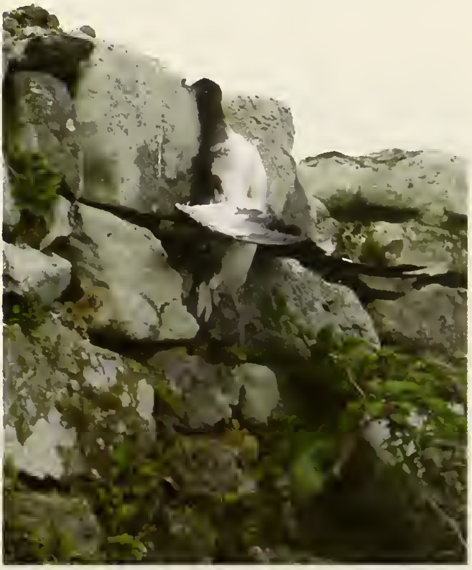
Manx Shearwaters hanging themselves when scaling vertical walls

The habit by Manx Shearwaters *Puffinus puffinus* of scaling rocks to reach high points from which to take off has been described briefly by Lockley (1942) and Brooke (1990). On 8th September 2003, on Skomer Island, Pembrokeshire, I came across a Manx Shearwater which had, apparently, inadvertently 'hanged' itself whilst scaling the vertical wall of a nineteenth-century lime kiln (292). It remained suspended, with half its bill embedded in mortar, and the body hanging below. The wings and feet were positioned as if it were climbing up the wall. I presumed that the bird, apparently a fledgling with a soft texture to the fresh, black plumage, had been scaling the building using its bill as an 'ice pick' to haul itself up, with the aid of fluttering wings and scrabbling feet. On hitting soft mortar, the bill had become embedded and then stuck. The wings and feet had perhaps then lost their grip, and the falling weight of the body caused the neck to break.

On 24th September 2003, another dead Manx Shearwater was found hanging from the


Juan G. Brown

292. Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus* found hanging from walls of lime kiln, Skomer Island, Pembrokeshire, 8th September 2003.


Juan G. Brown

293. Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus* found hanging from walls of lime kiln, Skomer Island, Pembrokeshire, 24th September 2003.

top of the lime-kiln wall. Again a juvenile, this bird had managed to scale the three-metre wall but, on reaching the top, its entire head had become tightly wedged in a crevice (293). In struggling to free itself, the neck had twisted round, and the bird died with its back to the wall. Ironically, the bird was just one final heave from reaching its launch-pad.

On Skomer, where all shearwater activity at the colony occurs at night, it is common to see Manx Shearwaters scrambling up vertical or steep-sided objects (including rocks, walls, fence posts and buildings) in their quest to find a point from which to launch themselves. They do this using their sharp claws, hooked bill and flapping wings. This is particularly so among young birds, which will make a few practice flights in the nights immediately before they fledge. Having survived a total of four months underground as eggs and chicks, the individuals in plates 292 & 293 came to an unfortunate end, before having chance to be tested by the rigours of an Atlantic crossing and the predatory intentions of Great Black-backed Gulls *Larus marinus*. The fact that the offending hazard was man-made is probably of little significance, as such accidents could equally occur in a natural rock crevices.

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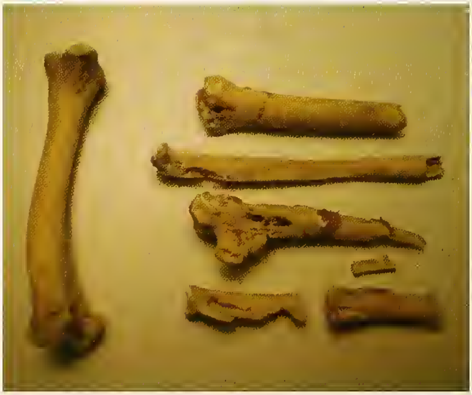
Avian remains in the stomach of Great Cormorant

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* numbers in the UK have increased over the past 25 years, and the birds have also extended their range inland, making increasing use of freshwater habitats. The Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) makes provision for the culling of limited numbers of Great Cormorants under licence, as an aid to scaring, to help prevent serious damage to fisheries, and where other management options are impractical. A condition of such licences has been that carcasses should be retained for post mortem examination, to enable cormorant diet at various fishery types to be assessed.



Alastair Cook

294. Avian remains recovered from the stomach of a male Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*, shot in March 2002 in southwest England, showing femur from domestic chicken *Gallus gallus* (left) and wrist and hand elements from a goose *Branta/Anser* (right).

Since 1993, over 1,300 Great Cormorants have been forwarded to the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) for examination. Prey has been found to consist almost exclusively of fish, encompassing most common freshwater species (Russell *et al.* 1996; CEFAS, unpublished data), and confirming the species' opportunistic feeding behaviour. One adult male, however, shot in March 2002 on a large reservoir in southwest England, contained avian remains, together with a relatively intact Perch *Perca fluviatilis.*

The avian remains were identified using the osteological collections of the Natural History Museum, Tring; they included a left femur of a domestic chicken *Gallus gallus*, and six fragmentary bones from the left wing of a young, but almost adult-sized, goose *Branta/Anser.* Owing to digestive damage, it was not possible to identify these remains to the species level. It is likely that these avian remains were scavenged. The wing elements from the goose would probably have been too difficult to swallow unless they were sufficiently rotten to have lost much of their feathering, including the primaries, while the chicken bones probably represented scavenged human food waste. Great Cormorants are known to scavenge dead fish (John Allcock pers. comm.).

BWP records occasional instances of both avian and mammalian prey in Great Cormorant diet, including ducklings and a kitten. Despite the large number of diet and feeding studies undertaken more recently, however, there appear to be no other records of Great Cormorants taking prey other than fish.

Acknowledgments

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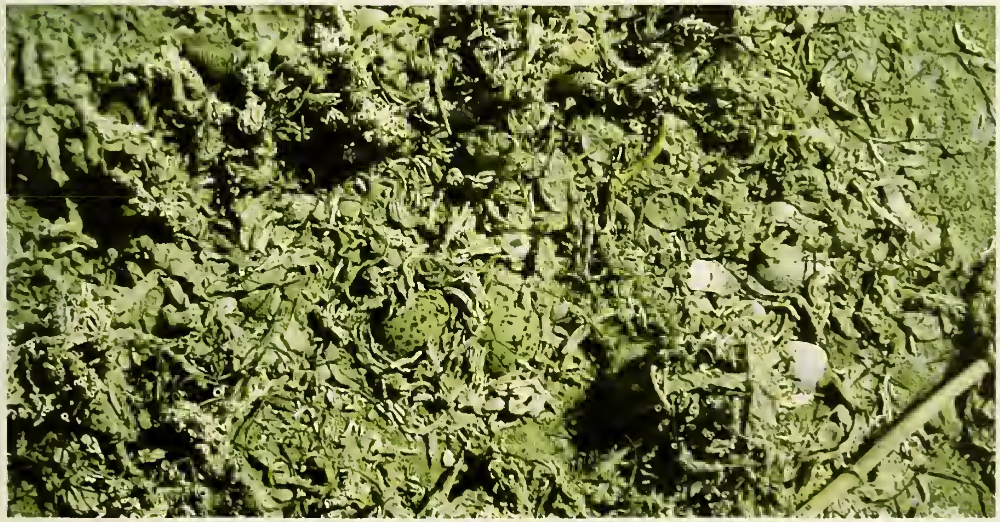
Kentish Plover nest covered with sand

On 4th May 2003, at the Gulf of Amvrakikos, Greece, I noticed some Kentish Plovers *Charadrius alexandrinus* chasing and displaying on the mudflats. Driving along a regularly used track, I had just passed two pairs behaving as if they had nests. Momentarily disturbed by the vehicle, they had returned to sit on what I presumed to be eggs, but on both occasions I was strangely unable to find a nest. I assumed that they were perhaps in the early part of a fresh breeding attempt after the failure of an earlier attempt, and were thus sitting in a new, empty scrape, although I could find no sign of a scrape either.

Shortly afterwards, I discovered another pair behaving in the same manner near the car. The female returned to sit on the ground c. 6 m from me and shuffled. I was positive that she was incubating, and again checked the spot. Initially I found nothing, but upon close inspection was surprised to find that she did indeed have two eggs, which were almost completely buried in the mud (plate 295)! The site was in a large, open area of tidal sandflats in which c. 12 pairs of Kentish Plovers were present, all displaying and behaving in a territorial manner. The nest was in a small patch of tideline debris and it appeared that the eggs been partially covered by


Phil Palmer

295. Nest scrape of Kentish Plovers *Charadrius alexandrinus*, Gulf of Amvrakikos, Greece, May 2003. The eggs are partially buried in the muddy sand of intertidal flats, as described in the text.

Phil Palmer

296. Pair of Kentish Plovers *Charadrius alexandrinus*, Gulf of Amvrakikos, Greece, May 2003.

water at some stage, allowing the sand to form a hard, mud-like crust around the eggs.

The pair quickly returned to the nest-site, and over a period of three hours I watched both male and female incubating the eggs. At no stage did this seem like a half-hearted breeding attempt, with both birds looking relaxed and settled when sitting. All other adjacent Kentish Plovers were driven away by the strongly territorial male. I was reluctant to disturb the pair further by walking back to the nest to re-examine the eggs more closely, but assumed that the eggs were sufficiently 'set' in the sand to prevent the adults turning them. At no stage did the adults even try to turn them or dig them out. Presumably, in this case the lower portion of the egg may have been damper and cooler than the upper – raising questions as to whether the eggs would have been incubated at the usual temperature and whether they would hatch.

I was not able to return at a later date, so do not know the eventual outcome, but assumed that at least the first two nests I searched for had also been covered in sand/mud. They were in a similar tidal zone and the adults had behaved in an identical manner. Other pairs higher up the beach in drier areas were presumably unaffected. *BWP* states that Kentish Plovers can cover their eggs in sand, usually at the approach of a predator; and also that they are capable of digging them out when danger has passed. These eggs, however, were sealed into the sand by the action of tidal water and looked as if they had been there for some time.

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Bouncing action of Common Snipe

Several field guides mention the 'bouncing' action of feeding Jack Snipe *Lymnocryptes minimus*, and the *Collins Bird Guide* (Svensson, Grant, Mullarney & Zetterström, 1999) refers to this behaviour as unique. On 5th March 2001, at Ogston Reservoir, Derbyshire, I watched two Common Snipes *Gallinago gallinago* feeding for several minutes, some 40 m away, on partly vegetated mud close to the water's edge. One fed normally, but the other was walking around slowly, occasionally probing the mud, and all the time moving its horizontal body up and down in an exaggerated fashion. At one point, both birds crouched and froze, as if responding to a threat, but then relaxed and carried on feeding as before, the bird in question continuing to 'bounce' even when it entered shallow water. Its movements were almost as striking and comical as those of Jack Snipe, which I have seen bouncing on many occasions, but somewhat slower, at roughly one bounce per second.

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Wing-bars in Arctic Warblers

Two Arctic Warblers *Phylloscopus borealis* were found on Foula, Shetland, in September 2003. On 9th September, one at Wurr Wick, in the north part of the island, was a typically striking individual with two distinct wing-bars, and it was clearly a juvenile in fresh plumage. Then, on 16th September, Geoff Atherton found what he thought might be another Arctic Warbler in the Hametoun Burn, at the south end of Foula, but it had only a single, faint wing-bar. I first saw this bird on 17th, and my first reaction on seeing the head pattern was 'Arctic', but this was followed almost immediately by 'hang on, where's the wing-bar?'

The bird was in an area that I use regularly for trapping migrants, and it was not long before the bird was caught and the identification was confirmed. In the hand, it did have a wing-bar, formed by pale tips to the outermost five greater coverts, while the inner primaries and secondaries showed the 'spiked' tips highlighted by Svensson (1992) as characteristic of Arctic Warbler and some Greenish Warblers but not other *Phylloscopus* warblers.

It was only when I studied my photographs later that I really appreciated what it was that made the wing-bar so indistinct. Unfortunately, by that time the bird had gone and I was unable to confirm it in the field. As shown in plate 297, the wing-bar on the greater coverts is formed by pale tips to the outer five feathers but the outermost two are only indistinctly tipped yellowish and the innermost pale-tipped feather is not particularly well marked either. I took this to indicate that they were unmoulted juvenile feathers (this was a first-year bird, confirmed by the immaculate condition of the remiges). Plate 298 shows how indistinct the wing-bar appears on the closed wing (and, at greater distance in the field, it was correspondingly even less distinct). To some extent, its appearance in the field would have depended on how the feathers were lying and how much some feathers overlapped and partly obscured others. This individual also had an extremely indistinct second wing-bar, formed by slight yellowish tips to the median coverts.

Very few adult Arctic Warblers have been recorded in Britain in autumn but one was caught on Fair Isle in 1994 (Bradshaw & Riddington 1995; R. Riddington pers. comm.). At the time, it posed an interesting field identification puzzle as it too had very little in the way of a wing-bar. Again, the capture of the bird confirmed its identification (see *Brit. Birds* 90: plates 38 & 39). Svensson (1992) noted that Arctic Warblers have particularly strong flight feathers, but the Fair Isle bird had well-worn remiges.

The partial post-juvenile moult of body feathers in Arctic Warblers apparently normally includes all of the greater and median coverts, but the Foula bird in plates 297 & 298 had clearly moulted only some of the greater coverts, and in addition it had retained its juvenile median coverts. Such variation may be worth bearing in mind when confronted with a potential Arctic Warbler with an indistinct wing-bar.

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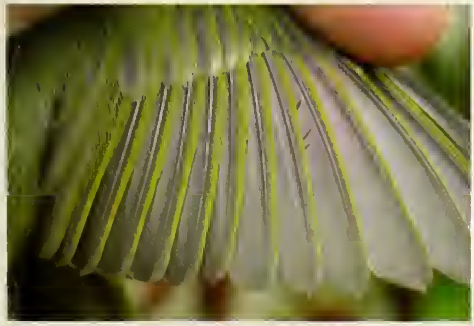
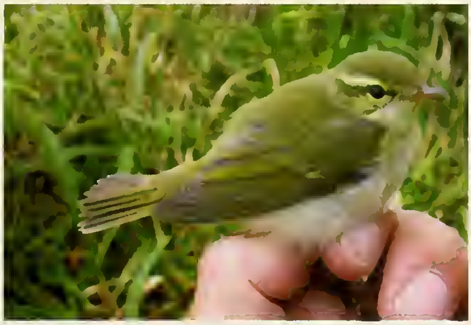


Tony Mainwood



Tony Mainwood

297-298. Juvenile Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*, Foula, Shetland, September 2003.

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Letters

Honey-buzzards in Britain

As a group, we have been observing and giving protection to Honey-buzzards *Pernis apivorus* in the New Forest, Hampshire, for the past 50 years. Normally, we do not publish our findings, but in recent years there has been such wild speculation as to the numbers of 'HBs' in this country (for example, *Brit. Birds* 96: 37-39) that we feel obliged to comment. In our experience, Honey-buzzards in Britain are simply a 'happy accident', and will probably continue to be so. Although they are common on the continent (with, for example, some 8,000-12,000 pairs in France alone; *BWP* Concise), we believe that if they had the potential to become common here they would have done so long ago.

The Honey-buzzard was apparently also rare in Gilbert White's time (the mid eighteenth century), and subsequent records show it to have been a scarce summer visitor since then. Occasionally, but generally rather haphazardly, new Honey-buzzards do arrive Britain to breed, generally appearing here in June or early July. Sometimes there are multiple arrivals, for example those bringing five new pairs to the New Forest in 1963 and five new pairs to Inverness-shire in 1972, but mostly these newcomers are represented by just one or two pairs. Already paired when they leave the wintering grounds, these new birds are hell-bent on finding a territory, drifting over the landscape vetting likely looking nest-sites by a trial-and-error process. Established birds are quick to show them which areas are spoken for. Confrontation between new arrivals and local breeding birds may result in spectacular aerial mayhem. During the 1963 New Forest influx, we observed birds crashing into the canopy while display-clapping. The existing birds seem to find such intrusion stressful, but fortunately the incomers do not relish confrontation, and if a suitable area (in terms of size and topography) is not free for the taking the interlopers will move on. Once an untenanted territory is found and the birds become established, they may remain faithful to their chosen spot for up to 25 years.

Once established, Honey-buzzards are extremely aggressive in defence of their territory, and this is probably one reason why, with the demise of an established pair, there will be no other birds waiting to move into that territory. Indeed, it could be as long as ten years before the vacant territory is reoccupied by fresh accidentals, always supposing that the territory should still exist. In the case of commercial conifer plantations, for example, habitat can change dramatically over that timescale, as the fate of Scottish birds faced with clear-felling demonstrates only too well. One example of how difficult it may be for new birds to become established is that of a pair which first arrived in the New Forest in July 1974. It was several summers before they began to breed, but they duly became an extremely successful pair, raising young every year. The female did not return in 1997 and the male failed to return in 1998; nonetheless, in their 'marriage' of 23 summers unbroken by 46 migrations, they raised a total of 33 young. Eight years on from their last success, their territory remains vacant. Should one member of an established pair die or fail to return, the remaining bird may be lucky enough to attract another accidental bird to continue the tenure of that territory, but we have known this to happen only once. In the 1970s, with the loss of his partner, a male spent the next three summers desperately displaying over and around his territory. In the fourth summer, he was lucky enough to acquire another mate. By contrast, a bereaved male in the 1960s spent six summers haunting his territory without similar success.

We have established that the young will not return to the natal area as, should they reappear within, say, 20 years, they would be seen off. In the 1980s, we had two resident pairs in our study area which between them produced 40 young; and during that time no other birds were seen. In 50 years we have observed over 150 successful nests, and this has been achieved with just 12-15 separate pairs. In the New Forest at least, experienced Honey-buzzards simply do not have non-breeding years – even in a bad year for wasps (Vespidae), an established pair will always find sufficient food. This may not be true in the harsher environments of Scotland. Conversely, new and inexperienced pairs in the New Forest are likely to fail in a bad food year.

There is no way of estimating how many new potential breeders arrive in Britain each year. Once here, their criteria for a desirable territory seem to differ somewhat from those of their French counterparts. In most cases, sustainable annual breeding occurs only in large afforested areas interspersed with wild heathland and rough pasture, which is now rare in Britain. It is unclear why British birds seek such near-wilderness conditions to nest in. Typically, they hunt successfully among the hedgerows and copses of our more familiar, well-ordered farmland, a habitat in which French Honey-buzzards are quite happy to nest, using tiny isolated copses or even lone trees in meadows. If our birds could only adapt to the French pattern, Britain could boast 1,000 pairs, but, as the most recent national survey suggests (*Brit. Birds* 95: 542), the present population is not certainly more than the 30-50 pairs which we estimated some 30 years ago.

Bob Emmett

299. This photograph shows the male of a pair of Honey-buzzards *Pernis apivorus* whose nest was robbed in 1961. Subsequently afforded close protection, the birds resumed successful breeding until 1977 (this photo was take in 1975). With their loss, the territory then remained vacant until 1995.

Although France may just be an infinitely better place for this species to find food, it is our experience that British birds in regular breeding areas fare surprisingly well. Furthermore, France also has bad summers and poor wasp years, when inevitably all birds struggle to raise a brood. Perhaps, unlike in France, where there are substantial numbers of several large raptors, few people give them a second glance, whereas in Britain, where every raptor is scrutinized and some still persecuted, it makes 'bird sense' to seek secluded nest sites.

Finally, we wish to emphasise the reason for our normal practice of secrecy. In our opinion, for any bird which is a likely target for egg-collectors, the release of annual information on their success or otherwise in no way helps that species. Given the fluctuation in the British Honey-buzzard population, we believe that the status of the species is still precarious, and that the less disturbance they suffer the better. We intend to continue in our policy of taking all necessary steps to ensure that the birds we guard are given the best chance of successful breeding.

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Pallid Harrier migration through Cyprus

The recent paper on Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* migration (Corso & Cardelli 2004) included no mention of migration through Cyprus. In fact, there is a significant spring passage through Cyprus, to the extent that one of the pleasures of birding here in early spring is the sight of the beautiful, ghostly males heading north. Totals for the whole island for recent years (spring, autumn) are as follows: 1999 (30, 6), 2000 (43, 31), 2001 (61, 16), 2002 (52, 29) (data from Cyprus Ornithological Society Annual Reports 46-48, BirdLife Cyprus Annual Report 1, Kuşkor North Cyprus Bird Reports 1999-2001, 2002 in prep., and unpublished data, excluding records where duplication may be involved). The data show a widespread movement through the island in spring, with a concentration at capes and promontories on the north coast.

These totals are based on casual observations but include several records of 3-5 (once 12) per day in spring at Zafer Burnu/Cape Andreas, with others at Koruçam Burnu/Cape Kormakiti and Yassı Burun/Cape Plakoti. In spring 2004, five were at Koruçam Burnu/Cape Kormakiti on 28th March, and five at Zafer Burnu/Cape

Andreas on 5th and 6th April (Dieter Joern pers. comm.). Systematic daily counts at these headlands, similar to those at the Strait of Messina, would probably result in higher spring totals. It is interesting that Stagg (1974) recorded only 12 at Cape Andreas during 4th-25th April 1973, fewer than might now be expected, which suggests that numbers passing through Cyprus in spring may have increased, as at the Strait of Messina (Corso & Cardelli 2004).

Many birds passing through the west of the island probably depart from Cape Arnouti, on the Akamas, and perhaps also from Pomos and Kokkina Points (all these sites have received little coverage). Furthermore, much of the north coast of Cyprus is roughly parallel to the south coast of Turkey, so in addition to a concentration of migrants at headlands there may also be an unobserved broad-front departure.

Corso & Cardelli (2004) stated that most passage records of Pallid Harrier in the Middle East are in autumn. The data for Cyprus presented here suggest the opposite, but may not reflect the true situation. In autumn, more immatures and fewer of the more easily identifiable adult males occur. Moreover, fewer birders are present, so more birds probably pass unnoticed or unidentified than in spring. The only recent systematic observations in autumn on the south coast are those of Frost (1994, 1998), who, in two autumns, recorded only four Pallid Harriers migrating at Akrotiri (considered the main raptor departure point). Nonetheless, the many records from other sites suggest that larger numbers (including 13 at Fig Tree Bay, Protaras, southeast Cyprus, on 11th September 2000; Axelsen 2000) do occur in autumn, so perhaps the main departure point of this species from Cyprus is not from Akrotiri.

Acknowledgments

My thanks to Dieter Joern and David Whaley for their observations, and to Vic Cozens and Bob Frost for their comments and answers to queries.

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'North American' Peregrine Falcons in Britain

Andrew Harrop's paper explaining the BOURC's rejection of the two old records of Peregrine Falcons *Falco peregrinus* showing characteristics of one or other of the three North American forms (Harrop 2004) brings to mind a bird from New Brunswick, Canada, which was recovered alive in Norfolk. The individual concerned was ringed in Fundy National Park on 18th July 1986 and found near Norwich on 30th December the same year.

The circumstances of the recovery, as reported to me at the RSPB soon after by the falconer concerned, were somewhat unusual, and involved an encounter between the falconer's trained Peregrine and a free-flying Peregrine, which the trained bird 'brought down' alive. The bird was wearing a metal leg ring, number 98727721. I reported the details to the BTO, who subsequently traced the ringing source.

The records show that the bird, a female, was ringed as a pullus, and the ringing location, immediately west of the Gulf of St Lawrence, argues for it being *F. p. anatum*, which is less likely to occur naturally in western Europe than the more migratory *tundrius* (Harrop 2004). The BTO's Species Recovery form assumes a possible ship-assisted passage for this individual (though there is no evidence of this), and as such appears to play down any likelihood of the bird having crossed the North Atlantic 'naturally'. This inadvertently reopens the debate over whether North American birds reaching Europe via a known or possible ship-assisted passage qualify for acceptance. It is also possible that the bird was unlawfully removed from its Canadian nest after ringing, or even trapped post-fledging, and then transported to Europe, before escaping, though at the time of its recovery the bird was not wearing falconry equipment. Moreover, given the level of legislative abuse at that time, involving both Peregrines and other birds of prey, on both sides of the Atlantic, it is of course possible to imagine even more complex scenarios to explain this bird's appearance in Norfolk. We must, however, question the likelihood of any reasonably intelligent thief or illegal dealer leaving in place an easily removable ring which might prove their own guilt or that of any subsequent recipient.

Given the known circumstances, this record seems unlikely to gain acceptance by the BOURC. Nonetheless, in view of the BOURC's recent rejection of the only two earlier British contenders, the above details should perhaps at least now be subjected to a formal rejection procedure.

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Barn Swallows and barn conversions

In their recent paper on the Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*, Evans & Robinson (2004) mentioned the loss of many traditional nesting sites through the redevelopment of old farm buildings. I do wonder, however, if this is of rather more significance than was suggested. As a Local Government Planning Officer in southwest England during the late 1980s, I became increasingly concerned about the change in planning policy which led to the mania for barn conversions, often ill-conceived and poorly designed, and the resulting loss of nesting sites for species such as swallows and Barn Owls *Tyto alba*. Of the many such buildings I had to inspect, a high proportion (at least 75%) showed evidence of occupation by swallows. From my own observations, Barn Swallows do not appear to favour modern farm buildings and, as there is little evidence to suggest a return to their original nest sites in caves and cliffs, one must surely conclude that the loss of traditional buildings must have had, and be continuing to have, a marked impact on the species.

Since most Planning Authorities still operate a remarkably relaxed barn conversion policy there appears to be little that can be done to ameliorate the situation, and the wholesale conversion of every decrepit and derelict building will continue to lessen the number of nesting sites for our favourite summer visitor. It would be a useful exercise to try to quantify the extent of the problem and to ascertain what happens to birds which are 'dispossessed'; and perhaps formulate a policy which would restrict the conversion of important nesting sites or, at least, ensure that developers provide 'swallow-friendly' conversions with the use of features such as open fronted garages. These conversions, incidentally, highlight another current problem referred to in the May issue of *BB* (*Brit. Birds* 97: 252); that the designs so frequently incorporate large glazed areas and thus contribute to the dangers of birds being killed by striking the glass.

Reference

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Reviews

SEABIRDS: A NATURAL HISTORY

By Anthony J. Gaston. T & A D Poyser, A&C Black, London, 2004. 222 pages; 16 pages of colour plates; maps, figures, tables, line-drawings, black-and-white photographs.
ISBN 0-7136-6568-8.
Hardback, £35.00.

Seabird ecologists are an odd group of people. Their subjects might require them to huddle atop cold, wet cliff-tops, grovel in foul-smelling, guano-filled caves or spend weeks lurching sickeningly aboard a ship miles from land, yet typically they retain an almost obsessive passion for their work. During the past 30 years, Tony Gaston has developed and maintained such a drive, and this is very much in evidence in this excellent book on the natural history of seabirds.

The book provides a detailed synthesis of seabird ecology, drawing together a large amount of material into a single volume. Early chapters define a seabird (which is not as straightforward as it might seem), and introduce some fields of study that marine ornithologists must consider in order to understand their study organisms (e.g. oceanography, fisheries, demography and social behaviour). The meat of book is divided into chapters that consider taxonomy, distribution, foraging, migration, breeding and population dynamics. Discussion of these topics is based on literature from peer-reviewed journals, while they are also illustrated with both colour and black-and-white photographs, as well as tables and figures. These chapters reveal much about the interaction between seabirds and the marine environment and also explore how characteristic life-history strategies may have evolved.

A number of seabird ecology texts exist already, so why does this book deserve a place in our already crowded bookcases? Initially, I assumed that this was a scientific text, the author having such an impressive publication record in the scientific literature, but the emphasis is, as the title suggests, on natural history, which is what really separates this from previous works. I found Gaston's writing style readable and immediately easy to follow. Instead of poring over this in the library, I found myself reading it to relax in the evening over a glass of wine or just before bed. This is not to say that the content is in any way compromised, for it is incredibly thorough and accurate; it is simply written by someone who not only knows their stuff but can communicate well, and so it is far more digestible than a typical scientific text. As well as summarising previous research it also highlights some more novel ideas. For example, it had never occurred to me that one reason that many Procellariiformes produce stomach oil is that whole food carried in the proventriculus (alimentary canal) during long foraging bouts will decompose. The preservative quality of stomach oil has not been studied but by highlighting such gaps in our knowledge, further research may be generated.

I did have one very minor quibble. Although generally cited throughout, not all statements are fully qualified by references from peer-reviewed literature. The author explains that this was to save space, although I felt that a more detailed list of citations would have been valuable to readers wishing to pursue further research, while detracting little from those who do not. Despite this, I would recommend this book to anyone with an interest in seabirds, whether you wish to know more about those distant shapes that pass your local headland each autumn or those stinky birds you ring each summer, or indeed understand a little more about why some of our seabird populations are facing meltdown.

Stephen C. Votier

NORTH NORFOLK SUMMER SKETCHBOOK

By James McCallum. Silver Brant, Wells-next-the-Sea, 2003. 140 pages; 98 colour plates; 88 colour sketches.
ISBN 0-9541695-2-2.
Hardback, £25.00.

James McCallum is at the forefront of the modern movement in bird art, where artists work directly from life. He is inspired by what he sees and discovers over long hours in the field, recording those fleeting glimpses which make birdwatching so endlessly fascinating. Prepared to spend time waiting, he has been richly rewarded during, for example, long periods watching Eurasian Bitterns *Botaurus stellaris*. Having discovered a potential feeding area, he is prepared to return to it, to sit, and wait; and, as he says, '…occasionally persistence pays off.' It certainly did, and the 13 paintings and drawings of this secretive bird are, in every way, a revelation. Similarly, his studies of two other species difficult to observe, Common Adders *Vipera berus* and European Nightjars *Caprimulgus europaeus*, have produced two remarkable series of drawings, testimony to James' determination and skill. His ability to work on the spot, in all weathers, is becoming legendary, and it results in a vibrant immediacy, lacking in the work of so many studio-bound artists. He records the casual, unplanned groupings of several different species that make birding such fun. He notes with relish the odd, sometimes awkward, positions that birds take up when actively feeding, preening or just getting on with life. And it is life that permeates all he does, with his quick, urgent line and dashing brush strokes. North Norfolk is lucky to have this obsessive and observant chronicler of its wildlife, much as Anglesey had Charles Tunnicliffe and Galloway has Donald Watson. And, like them, his pen writes as well as it draws.

At the heart of the book are 30 pages which bring together paintings depicting bird life (particularly Common Redshanks *Tringa totanus*, Northern Lapwings *Vanellus vanellus* and Avocets *Recurvirostra avosetta*) on the grazing marshes over the summer. From courtship to nesting, from rearing chicks to fledged young, from dawn to dusk, they evoke the hectic and quiet moments wonderfully. The book concludes with nearly 30 full-page paintings illustrating the return of passage waders to the creeks and marshes. It is the arrival of the first Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca* which signifies the end of summer and the first days of autumn.

I cannot recommend this book too highly, and, as Ian Wallace says in his perceptive foreword '... don't put it on a shelf, keep it on your bedside table for better dreams.' The available from the author, tel. (01328) 820176.

Robert Gillmor

A BIRDWATCHERS' GUIDE TO MOROCCO

By Patrick and Fedora Bergier.
Prion, Cley-next-the-Sea, 2003.
166 pages; maps;
line-drawings.
ISBN 1-871104-09-2.
Paperback, £14.75.

This is the second edition of a book which first appeared in 1990; it is considerably larger than the original (now covering around 50 sites, as opposed to 15), and fully updated. During the period since the first edition, Morocco has developed rapidly from a tourist's perspective and is now a fairly straightforward country for birders who wish to travel independently, so this new edition is particularly welcome.

The first 20 pages or so comprise a well-thought-out introduction to Morocco, including pre-trip information, travel to and within the country, accommodation, food, climate, geography and so on. The summary provided is entirely appropriate for this book, but unless you are determined to look at nothing but birds, you will probably want to take a more general guide-book as well.

The information on sites, which forms the bulk of the book, is divided up into 'location', 'accommodation', 'strategy', 'birds' and 'other wildlife'. Most sites or areas have one or two maps to accompany them, and these are excellent and easy to follow. On the basis of my own experience, having been to Morocco for the first time in 2003 (sadly without this book, or its predecessor), the information presented appears to be accurate, authoritative, and bang up-to-date. I particularly enjoyed the sections on 'strategy', which suggest ways to maximise your return, point out each area's 'hotspots', and outline a recommended approach for particularly difficult species. The latter will be invaluable when hunting for things like Dupont's Lark *Chersophilus duponti*. Of course, success is never guaranteed but at least you will not be sitting on the plane home feeling that your tactics were wanting. At the end, there is a full species list (birds and other wildlife), selected bibliography and list of local contacts.

A commendable attention to detail characterises this guide from start to finish. If you are travelling to Morocco, this book should be one of the first things in your hand luggage. Simple as that.

Roger Riddington

RED KITES IN THE CHILTERNS

By Ian Carter and Gerry
Whitlow. English Nature and
The Chilterns Conservation
Board, Princes Risborough,
2004. 32 pages; many colour
photographs. ISBN 0-9545242-
1-7. Paperback, £3.00.

An excellent colour guide, describing the remarkably successful reintroduction programme of the Red Kite *Milvus milvus* to the Chilterns. It provides an ideal glove-compartment booklet for any avid birdwatcher, casual naturalist or keen layman visiting this beautiful area. It is packed with interesting detail, covering many topics, including: history (Red Kites last bred in Buckinghamshire in the early 1800s, in Oxfordshire in 1832); reintroduction (the programme started in 1989 with birds from northern Spain, they first bred successfully in 1991, there were 177 pairs in 2003, with a population of some 1,000 birds); diet and foraging; nest sites; plumage and moult (useful detail on ageing and sexing given here); social behaviour (roosts may now exceed 200 birds); aerial interaction (depicted neatly by Gerry Whitlow's excellent colour pictures); wing-tags and monitoring; visitors from other areas (regular movement to feeding stations in central Wales); and persecution (sadly, losses to traffic, electrocution, poisoning and egg-stealing – one leading to a £4,000 fine). A useful map depicts the current range and sensible advice on viewing the kites. Once hooked on this majestic bird, many will wish to explore 'Future information and useful contacts', including the first author's *The Red Kite* (Arlequin Press, 2001).

David Glue

LARK MIRRORS: FOLK ART FROM THE PAST

By Herman F. Arentsen and Natalino Fenech. Privately published, Valletta, Malta, 2004. 140 pages; many black-and-white illustrations. ISBN: 99932-0-283-3. Paperback £25.00, hardback £45.00.

Although British Sky Larks *Alauda arvensis* are largely sedentary, the species is a short- to medium-distance migrant across most of its central and northern European range. Before massive population declines during the twentieth century, Sky Lark migration must have rated as one of the most spectacular mass movements of birds ever witnessed. Nineteenth century accounts describe vast, sky-darkening flocks of Sky Larks arriving along the east coast of Britain, most en route to wintering grounds in France and Iberia. Hardly surprisingly, these vast movements attracted the attention of hunters. These fell into two classes: hunters who earned income by capturing birds to feed the growing London and Paris meat and cagebird markets; and recreational hunters, whose primary interest was not income but sport. The former depended largely on trapping larks in nets, while the latter employed a strange lure quite unlike anything else, the 'lark mirror' (or 'lark glass').

Although almost infinitely varied in shape, lark mirrors followed a basic pattern – a rotating beam, around 20-30 cm long, usually studded with small mirrors, supported on a peg stuck into the ground. The beam was rotated either by pulling on a string, or by clockwork or electric motors. During the autumn migration, hunters across Europe flooded into selected fields and set their mirrors. Often four or five hunting parties would set their mirrors in the same field, competing for the attentions of the migrating birds overhead. When birds were spotted, the beams were set spinning, and the effect on the migrants appears to have been mesmeric. The birds would drop from the sky like a stone, and perch or hover around the mirror oblivious to the hail of pellets and shot being directed at them. So dramatic was this attraction that over a thousand birds could be killed in this way in a single day. Just why the birds find these spinning trinkets so fatally attractive is unknown, though a number of unlikely contemporary explanations are presented.

This extraordinary book charts the history of these mirrors, describing their evolution, design and use and illustrating many of the major forms. Although produced commercially, the authors argue that the thriving cottage industry in manufacturing mirrors led to the development of a form of folk art. In describing the development and use of lark mirrors, the authors have uncovered a wealth of information on migration, on Sky Larks and on the social history of hunting that will be of widespread interest. The book is available from the authors (e-mail: nfenech@dunelm.co.uk)

Paul Donald

THE BIG YEAR: A TALE OF MAN, NATURE AND FOWL OBSESSION

By Mark Obmascik. Doubleday, 2004. 268 pages. ISBN 0-385-60532-3. Hardback, £12.99.

Bird races are probably the most tongue-in-cheek 'brand' of birdwatching, and therefore not everyone's cup of tea. They are a North American invention, which, axiomatically, means that extreme examples of the genre abound. So there are Big Days, Big Sits (use your imagination), 'World Series' team-sponsored 24-hour events and, forming the basis for this book, Big Years. Roger Tory Peterson and James Fisher luxuriated in non-stop, day-after-day birding for three months in 1953 and published the tale of their 30,000-mile odyssey as *Wild America*. Peterson added a seemingly innocuous one-liner as a footnote stating that his 'year's list' amounted to 572 species. Well, that did it!

In the same way that no-one remembers the name of the second person to walk on the moon, the guy who racked up the next North American year list has long since been forgotten. He was Stuart Keith, a 25-year-old graduate fresh out of, wait for it, Oxford! His score? 598 in 1956. Since then efforts at attaining ever-higher totals have smacked of attempts on Everest. In 1973, 18-year-old Kenn Kaufman thumbed 69,200 miles across the continent, survived on cat food, sold his blood for cash, and saw 669 species – alas, still three less than a motorized rival, Floyd Murdoch.

Mark Obmascik's book follows the fortunes of three combatants who devoted every second of 1998 to a North American Big Year. For each, the planning was of a moon shot degree of thoroughness even though, to begin with, none of them knew that an opponent had entered the field. The results were dizzy-high tallies, tinged with end-of-an-era sadness. How come? Well, two factors strongly suggest that the 1998 totals will never be bettered. First, trips to Attu Island, the most westerly of the Aleutian Islands with a regular supply of Palearctic spring migrants, have come to an end since the US authorities closed the island to visitors in 2000. Second, sweaty dashes to airports to board flights at the last minute following news of a rare bird are likely to be dogged by security red tape in a post 9-11 world.

What is the book like? You might be tempted to guess that it is splattered with exclamation marks and puerile, twitcheresque prose of the 'expletive deleted' variety. Far from it. Nor does it wallow in any navel-gazing introspective, setting birders apart from the rest of *Homo sapiens* as though we are 'tribe members' worthy of literary psychoanalysis. To be honest, I expected both. Instead, I got one of the greatest breaths of fresh air to be published as birding narrative. This book is so good that I gave up birding time to read it. I could not put it down and, when I had finished, I desperately wanted more. Mark Obmascik writes about the three central characters in a way that makes you think you are reading fast-paced crime fiction. He spent huge amounts of time with each and builds character portraits that, over the course of the story, make them live in the book's pages as much as Wayne Rooney comes alive on a television screen.

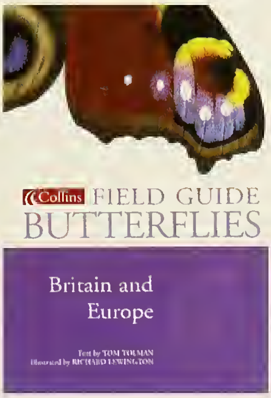
This is book about people more than just birds. No cobwebs seem to be outside the reach of Mark Obmascik's broom, and each character emerges as likeable – or at least absorbing and forgivable. Into the bargain, the book is an Aladdin's Cave of homespun anecdotes. Wide-ranging topics are showcased – the history of military campaigns fought on Attu, the processes that cause El Nino – yet the author manages to top chunks of knowledge with sparkles of humour. Here's one example: 'All told, the El Nino of 1997 killed at least 2,000 people and caused at least $36 billion damage of economic damage. It did, however, make for excellent birding.'

I hate to spoil such richly deserved praise with a quibble. Moreover, I bet my gripe has nothing to do with the author. It is this. Publishers, please use initial capitals for bird names. Please do not belittle the things that fascinate us by reducing their species names to a demeaning and confusing lower case. Finally, back to first impressions. Logically, this has to mean the cover design. Yes, like the rest of the contents, it is also funny and memorable. So much so that, in future, I think we will all know the name – Obmascik!

Anthony McGeehan

COLLINS FIELD GUIDE TO THE BUTTERFLIES OF BRITAIN AND EUROPE

By Tom Tolman, illustrated by Richard Lewington. 2nd edition. HarperCollins, London, 2004. 528 pages; colour paintings; distribution maps. ISBN 0-00-718991-5. Hardback, £25.00.



'Not another guide to butterflies!' was my initial reaction on picking up this book. Well, yes and no. The unfamiliar cover suggested a new publication but, on opening the book, all became clear: this is a new edition of a former classic.

This impressive book covers the butterflies of Europe and North Africa, some 440 species in total. With so many species to describe, the author has done well to provide each species with an authoritative yet accessible account. The text for each species comprises sections on range, distribution, variation, flight-period, habitat, life-history, behaviour and conservation. The use of abbreviations has been necessary, but these are mainly intuitive and are fully explained. A distribution map is provided for almost all species. The text is complemented with over 100 pages of superb illustrations by Richard Lewington, depicting males, females and any distinct forms. The illustrations are grouped together in the centre of the book which may not please everyone.

So, besides the cover, what else has changed? A comparison with my well-thumbed copy, would suggest little, if anything. It seems strange that this opportunity to bring the guide more up-to-date was missed. For example, the text and distribution map for Wood White *Leptidea sinapis* have not been updated to reflect the discovery in 2001 of Réal's Wood White *L. reali* in Ireland. Minor niggles should not detract from what is a fantastic and inspiring book. It is an essential guide for anyone travelling in Europe with an interest in butterflies, and I thoroughly recommend it.

Simon Stirrup

News and comment

Compiled by Adrian Pitches

Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of *British Birds*

Seabird meltdown not confined to Shetland

It is now clear that the catastrophic breeding season for seabirds reported in last month's N&c (*Brit. Birds* 97: 425) has not been restricted to Shetland. Virtually the whole of the latest Shetland Bird Club newsletter is devoted to a series of deeply troubling reports of struggling seabirds from points throughout Shetland, but also at other key sites in northern Britain and in the North Sea. For starters, Stuart Williams reports that Orkney appears to have fared little better than Shetland. Arctic Terns *Sterna paradisaea* have suffered almost complete failure, many Kittiwakes *Rissa tridactyla* failed to build nests (and most of those that did failed to lay eggs) while Arctic Skuas *Stercorarius parasiticus*, which depend heavily on parasitising the terns, have been similarly hit hard. Like Shetland, it is not too surprising to find these particular species in difficulties in a poor year but, also like Shetland, the fact that Fulmars *Fulmarus glacialis*, Great Skuas *S. skua* and Common Guillemots *Uria aalge* are in dire straits is sobering. Northern Gannets *Morus bassanus* and Great Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo*, which are less dependent on sandeels *Ammodytes* than most other seabirds, appear to be the only species coping adequately in the Northern Isles this summer.

Farther south, in the Moray Firth, seabird breeding success was also poor, being below average for all speces except Razorbills *Alca torda*. On the Isle of May, in Fife, Sarah Wanless observes that many breeding species have experienced difficulties, though perhaps not to the extent of those apparent in the Northern Isles. Nonetheless, those Common Guillemot chicks that did fledge were very underweight. Razorbills *Alca torda* and Kittiwakes appeared to be faring better initially, but success of the former was below average, while the latter failed at the mid to late chick stage. Shags *P. aristotelis* and Puffins *Fratercula arctica* were badly affected by storms in June, and productivity was extremely low for both species. Out at sea, Kees Camphuysen has been carrying out regular surveys from a research vessel in the North Sea between Britain and the continent for many years. This year there were plenty of indicators of an ecosystem in trouble: virtually no Common Guillemot chicks at sea (although plenty of Razorbill chicks); both Common Guillemots and Razorbills carrying diverse prey back to colonies, including flat fish; Fulmars in poor plumage condition (having arrested their moult, presumably because body condition is poor); many more skuas lingering around in the southern part of the study area than normal and, conversely, an unusual lack of cetacean activity in the north, from the Moray Firth up to the Northern Isles.

In fact, the only bright spot in the reports we've received in recent weeks comes from the west coast, from Juan Brown, the warden on Skomer, in Pembrokeshire. Juan reports that there are plenty of fish, including sandeels, in the waters off Skomer (which suggests that there is little commonality with the marine ecosystem of the northwest North Sea), and although some seabirds have experienced slightly below-average breeding success, this in many cases is due to factors such as predation by Great Black-backed Gulls *Larus marinus* rather than a lack of food. The only real blip was a decrease in numbers of breeding Kittiwakes by about a third compared with 2003.

Seabirds starved out in Yorkshire

The problems in Scottish waters have also been felt at England's biggest mainland seabird colony, the RSPB reserve at Bempton Cliffs, in East Yorkshire. This year looks set to be the worst on record for nesting Kittiwakes at Bempton with, again, an acute shortage of food the most likely cause. Kittiwakes at Bempton feed mainly on sandeels, yet more evidence that the sandeel problem is not restricted to sea areas around the Northern Isles. Trevor Charlton, RSPB warden at Bempton Cliffs, said: 'This has been an unbelievably bad breeding season for the Kittiwakes on the Yorkshire coast. [They] have not only been badly hit by a severe shortage of sandeels again this season, but also by the most unseasonably bad weather that we have seen for many years. It has been a disastrous double blow for our nesting seabirds. There is an urgent need for more research into the sandeel situation and continued monitoring of seabird populations. If climate change predictions are correct then the situation will get even worse in coming years.'

One possible explanation for the sandeel shortage is that climate change has driven a rise in sea temperatures and affected ocean currents. In turn, this is changing the plankton mix upon which the sandeel larvae feed, with the result that many of the small fish are not surviving or growing to full size. Head of Marine Policy at the RSPB, Euan Dunn, said: 'We could well be seeing the single biggest change in the North Sea since it was formed 10,000 years ago. Sandeels prop up the marine food web, from cod and mackerel to Kittiwakes. There is now a compelling case for reigning in even further the commercial industrial fishery for sandeels, which itself is struggling to find enough fish to catch.'

Although there is a ban on fishing for sandeels off eastern Scotland, the Danish fishing fleet has not been prevented from taking sandeels elsewhere in the North Sea. EU fisheries ministers agreed a quota of 826,000 tonnes in 2004 despite the fishermen struggling to catch 300,000 tonnes of a one-million-tonne quota in 2003.

Seabirds washed out in Northumberland

Paul Morrison/RSPB

300. Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* chick with pipefish *Syngnathus*, Coquet Island, Northumberland, summer 2004 – more than a mouthful.

England's biggest offshore seabird colonies have also had a dreadful season, although it appears that the weather was the prime culprit here. Storms lashed the Farne Islands, off the Northumberland coast, on 24th-25th June with half of the total rainfall recorded during 2003 falling in just those two days. The colonies of Arctic, Common *Sterna hirundo* and Sandwich Terns *S. sandvicensis* suffered desperately high chick mortality; for example, National Trust wardens found 1,000 dead chicks among the 2,000 pairs of nesting Sandwich Terns.

On Brownsman island, 730 pairs of Arctic Terns fledged fewer than 100 young. The storms were so severe that waves crashed right over the Pinnacles, towering stacks off Staple Island, swamping the nests of Shags, Common Guillemots and Razorbills. With a population of 35,000 pairs, the Farnes are internationally important for Puffins but inundation of Puffin burrows led to 65% of young birds being lost, a similar problem to that reported on the Isle of May. Head warden John Walton told N&c that, to add insult to injury, those chicks which managed to survive the weather's onslaught have been faced with food shortages as well, which has resulted in one of the worst nesting seasons ever on the Farnes.

Farther south in Northumberland, on Coquet Island, there was some better news as the Roseate Tern *S. dougallii* colony rose to an all-time high of 73 pairs. Nestlings were afforded protection from the elements by innovative nestboxes provided by RSPB warden Paul Morrison (see *Brit. Birds* 95: 469). However, food shortages were apparent here too and productivity is unlikely to match 2003 when 70 pairs of Roseates raised 80 young. The lack of sandeels meant that many parent terns were bringing in pipefish *Syngnathus* to chicks, and in some cases wardens had to remove them from nestlings' gullets to prevent them choking (see plate 300).

Terns take to custom-built peninsula

Happier news was received from the opposite side of the North Sea, where a man-made peninsula, constructed as a refuge for terns nesting on land scheduled for industrial development, now holds 2% of the world's breeding Sandwich Terns. In the mid 1980s, the harbour in the Belgian city of Zeebrugge was massively increased, with the construction of two dams reaching far into the sea. Almost immediately, Common Terns began to use the new industrial land for breeding, and the first Sandwich Terns arrived in 1989.

To create a long-term breeding site for the birds – whose dune and beach habitats are under pressure from holidaymakers – sand and seashells were spread on the eastern dam. Despite this, and later efforts to build a 3.5-ha peninsula for the birds to use, almost all the terns remained in parts of the harbour where industrial development was planned. In the early spring of 2004, however, the size of the peninsula was doubled to 7 ha, and terns immediately adopted the new site. All of the harbour's 3,400 pairs of Sandwich Tern bred on the peninsula this year, along with more than 1,000 pairs of Common Tern and 150 pairs of Little Tern *S. albifrons* (half the harbour's population of the latter two species). Breeding productivity data were not available as we go to press, so it is not clear whether food shortages were so critical in this part of the eastern North Sea. The peninsula was a joint project by the Flemish regional government, Zeebrugge harbour authorities and BirdLife Belgium.

STOP PRESS

Colin Bibby died peacefully in his sleep on 7th August. One of Britain's outstanding ornithologists, Colin was a great contributor to *BB*, being a member of the Notes Panel, a regular judge of the Best Bird Book competition and writing numerous reviews. He will be sorely missed. A full obituary will appear in due course.

Hen Harrier spread is halted

English Nature has revealed that the numbers of young Hen Harriers *Circus cyaneus* raised in England in 2004 are on a par with those in 2003, but that all eight successful breeding pairs were restricted to just one area – the Bowland Fells, in Lancashire. There were ten nesting attempts in Bowland, and the eight successful pairs produced 28 young, an amazing productivity rate of 3.5 young per nest. By comparison, in 2003 there were 23 nesting attempts at six sites in England, with nine successful pairs raising 30 young. Since 1994, the number of successful pairs in England has varied between five and 14, excluding 2001 when foot-and-mouth disease restrictions hampered monitoring.

English Nature's Andy Brown said: 'It is of great concern to English Nature that the Hen Harrier has only been able to raise young in one area of England this year. Without a consistent increase in range and in the number of breeding pairs, this bird's future looks extremely doubtful. It is a great pity that the extensive efforts of many people across England have failed to boost numbers. The successes at Bowland are the one bright spot in an otherwise gloomy picture. We would particularly like to acknowledge the major contribution of the RSPB, and the support of United Utilities and private moorland grouse estates at Bowland, without whom there would be no young Hen Harriers in England this year.' The results of three years of monitoring from English Nature's Hen Harrier Recovery Project confirm that illegal persecution is the main reason that the Hen Harrier population is so low in England. Birds have not returned to breed at a number of nesting sites where illegal persecution was recorded last year.

If you saw a Hen Harrier in breeding habitat this year, or if you see a wing-tagged bird this autumn/winter, please contact Richard Saunders, Hen Harrier Project Officer, English Nature Cumbria Team, tel. (01539) 792800.

RSPB launches vulture appeal

The RSPB has taken the unusual step of launching a direct appeal to members to help save birds that are not found in Britain, or even in Europe. The latest issue of *Birds* magazine contains an appeal to save Asia's vultures from extinction, specifically the Indian White-backed Vulture *Gyps bengalensis*, the Indian (Long-billed) Vulture *G. indicus* and the Slender-billed Vulture *G. tenuirostris*. The Indian White-backed Vulture was once the commonest large bird of prey in the world, with a population of 30 million individuals, but numbers fell by a catastrophic 99.4% between 1992 and 2003. Over the same period, Long-billed and Slender-billed Vultures declined by 97.4%.

Initially, a virus was believed to be responsible for the population collapse, but it now appears that *Diclofenac*, an anti-inflammatory drug widely used to treat domestic livestock in the Indian subcontinent, has poisoned the vultures, which die from kidney failure and a form of gout after feeding on cattle carcasses (see *Brit. Birds* 96: 349). The vulture populations have now passed the point of sustainability without human intervention, and a captive-breeding programme in India, with the release of birds in years to come when *Diclofenac* has been replaced by a harmless alternative, is planned. As a precedent for such a programme, the RSPB point to the successful reintroduction of Griffon Vultures *G. fulvus* in France. A suggested donation of £25.00 will help build the aviaries at the Vulture Centre in Haryana state to house the captive vultures (send your donations to the RSPB Asian Vulture Appeal, Freepost ANG 10850, 17 Birkheads Road, Reigate, Surrey RH2 9ZW).

New vulture populations in Cambodia

Meanwhile, BirdLife reports that at least 28 Slender-billed Vultures have been sighted in Siem Pang District, northeast Cambodia – at least four times as many as the previous largest single count in Indochina. Altogether, more than 120 Slender-billed and Indian White-backed Vultures, the largest single gathering recorded in Indochina during the past 15 years, were recorded during a 'vulture restaurant' training course held in Stung Treng Province by BirdLife International and the Wildlife Conservation Society. Fortunately, *Diclofenac* appears to be rarely used for veterinary purposes in Cambodia. Instead, the greatest threats appear to be a lack of available food, direct persecution through hunting, and through capture for the pet trade and for their perceived medicinal value.

In South Africa, vulture feeding stations, known as 'vulture restaurants', have become tourist attractions, and this management strategy might be successfully implemented in Cambodia's protected areas and forests. Given the catastrophic situation of vultures elsewhere in Asia, Cambodia could provide an important stronghold. 'If South Asia's *Gyps* vultures become extinct, only two disparate wild populations of two species (Indian White-backed and Slender-billed) will exist, one in northeast Cambodia and southern Lao PDR, and one in Myanmar' said Dr Sean Austin, of BirdLife International's Cambodia Programme.

Loophole closed for tourist egg collectors

It is now an offence for anyone in England, Wales or Scotland to possess or sell any bird or egg that has been taken illegally from the wild anywhere within an EU member state. Previously, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 protected only those birds resident in Great Britain; it did not prevent anyone from travelling to Europe, taking a bird illegally from the wild and keeping it in captivity, or using it for trade. This new legislation ensures that anyone keeping or trading in birds illegally taken from the wild in Europe now faces the possibility of prosecution once they return to the UK and is belated recognition that the implementation into British law of the 1979 EU Birds Directive left a significant loophole.

Bitterns are booming

The Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* has become one of Britain's greatest wildlife success stories, according to the RSPB and English Nature. Figures for 2004 show that the population has increased fivefold in just seven years. In 1997, only 11 Eurasian Bitterns were found during a UK-wide survey, but this year there were at least 55 at 30 sites, including strongholds in East Anglia and around the Humber, with others in Lancashire, Wales, Kent and Somerset. A government action plan for the Eurasian Bittern had aimed for 50 booming males by 2010, but it seems extraordinary to report that the target has been broken six years early. A highlight from eastern England was an increase to 17 booming males in the Norfolk Broads, up from 12 in 2003. At Minsmere, in Suffolk, numbers increased for the sixth successive year (to nine in 2004), while the newly created reedbeds at the RSPB's Lakenheath Fen reserve also attracted a booming bittern.

Tim Loseby

301. Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*, Lea Valley, Essex.

Bittern expert Gillian Gilbert said: 'Bitterns are now recovering at a faster rate than anyone dared hope for only a few years ago, when their numbers were in steep decline. The Eurasian Bittern needs extensive wet reedbeds to survive but decades of drainage, pollution and lack of management destroyed most of their available habitat, and by 1997 we feared it faced imminent extinction in Britain.' Extensive reedbed creation and restoration work, part-funded by the EU, has helped turn the bird's fortunes around but it has yet to match the numbers of 50 years ago. After being driven to extinction in Britain through persecution by 1886, it recolonised the Norfolk Broads in 1911; the population had increased to an estimated 80 booming males in 1954, which included 55 in the Broads.

Iberian nightjar in Yorkshire

The first-ever foreign-ringed European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* to be found in Britain & Ireland was caught by a ringer taking part in the BTO's national Nightjar survey. The bird was originally ringed in Spain, and was controlled in Wykeham Forest, near Scarborough, North Yorkshire, by Mike Pearson of the East Yorkshire Ringing Group. The BTO's Mark Grantham commented that over 4,300 European Nightjars have been ringed in Britain & Ireland since 1909, which have produced no fewer than 90 recoveries, as far afield as Algeria and Morocco. European Nightjars faced a bleak future in the UK just 20 years ago, but the species is now undergoing something of a revival. The national survey is being undertaken by the Forestry Commission, BTO, English Nature and the RSPB. The last census estimated a UK population of 3,400 males, a 50% increase on the low point of 1981. Wykeham Forest, together with Dalby and Cropton Forests, near Pickering, are the main northern strongholds, with over 100 'churring' males.

Where there's smoke… there's a hawk

Raptors are routinely accused of various crimes by grouse-moor managers and pigeon fanciers but no-one has listed arson among those misdemeanours… until now. An unfortunate Red-tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis* appears to have started a brushfire in California which prompted the evacuation of 1,600 homes. The Foothill fire near Santa Clarita, about 35 km north-west of Los Angeles, charred over 2,300 ha of land in late July. The Los Angeles County fire department traced the source of the blaze to a Red-tailed Hawk that was apparently electrocuted by power lines and fell to the ground, igniting brush that had not burned since 1962.

Council action against bird feeders

When the letter arrived from High Peak borough council, Deborah and Graham Shearer, who live in Glossop, in Derbyshire, were a little shocked by its contents. They were told that they should stop feeding wild birds in their garden because the birds were making too much noise in the morning. The letter said there had been complaints about the early-morning racket the birds made and the prospect of bird seed attracting rats to the area. The couple, baffled by the directive, have vowed to continue feeding their garden birds.

'We do not have a problem with people feeding wild birds,' said a council spokeswoman, 'but when we receive complaints that these activities are causing a nuisance to other people then we will contact the parties subject to the allegations just to draw their attention to the complaints that are being made about them. If we were to receive repeated complaints then we would make a formal investigation. Following the incident with Mr and Mrs Shearer we will be reviewing our procedures.'

Gurney's Pitta stronghold discovered

The world's largest population of the critically endangered Gurney's Pitta *Pitta gurneyi* has been found in forest adjacent to the proposed Lenya National Park in southern Myanmar (Burma). The surveys were conducted by a team of conservationists from BirdLife International, the Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association (BANCA), and the Myanmar Department of Forests. Around 150 contacts with Gurney's Pitta were recorded. Until May 2003, the 'jewel thrush' had a known world population of fewer than 20 individuals at Khao Nor Chuchi, in Thailand, but then four small populations were discovered across the border in southern Myanmar (*Brit. Birds* 96: 349). This new population is likely to number in the region of several hundred pairs, offering renewed hope for the species.

Jonathan Eames, Programme Manager of BirdLife International in the region and a member of the survey team, said: 'Our surveys show that Ngawun Reserve Forest is of international importance for Gurney's Pitta and other threatened species. The fact that Ngawun Reserve Forest is adjacent to the proposed Lenya National Park presents the Government of Myanmar with a tremendous conservation opportunity. If these areas were combined, through a modification of the proposed boundaries to Lenya National Park, it would conserve a representative example of the wildlife and forests that once cloaked southern Myanmar and neighbouring Thailand.'

Minsmere under threat

The future of the RSPB's flagship reserve at Minsmere, in Suffolk, is under scrutiny as a consultation on its sea defences gets underway. The Environment Agency is now considering the options for sea defences for the next 100 years for the Minsmere frontage, south to Sizewell power station. In principle, the RSPB welcomes this review, given the vulnerability of this low-lying coast to rising sea levels (there was a small breach in the sand dunes north of Minsmere's North Wall last winter). The Society is, however, concerned that internationally important freshwater wetlands could be lost; current problems maintaining the dunes and shingle ridge are likely to worsen as a result of increasing numbers of storms and rising sea levels, but the RSPB still wishes to see Minsmere protected for as long as practically possible. Consultants working for the Environment Agency have prepared a range of options for the future, ranging from holding the present line of defence to retreating to high ground. The Agency is seeking the views of the public and organisations at this early stage, and the RSPB is encouraging local members and others to voice their opinions. A range of technical studies will follow, which will help give a clearer picture of Minsmere's long-term future.

Oh deer!

Two corrections are required to last month's item about European Golden Plovers *Pluvialis apricaria*, Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus* and ticks (*Brit. Birds* 97: 427). Norman McCanch observed that we mistakenly referred to Red Deer *Cervus elaphus* as *C. eldii*, and commented that *C. eldii* is Eld's Deer, found in northeast India, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and southern China. 'I handled a few specimens years ago when I was training as a taxidermist, and once found two sets of Eld's antlers in a junk shop in Norfolk (not locally taken)!!' The same item also stated that 'In humans, ticks carrying harmful protozoa can cause… Lyme disease.' Philip Radford contacted us to point out that Lyme disease in humans is caused by a tick-borne bacterium *Borrelia burgdorferi*, which is a spirochete. Thanks to Norman and Philip for keeping us straight!

New threat to the Ebro Delta

Within weeks of its reprieve from a potentially devastating water transfer scheme (*Brit. Birds* 97: 310), the Ebro Delta in northeast Spain faces a new threat. Nine wind farms, comprising 144 turbines, are planned just 5 km off the coast of the Delta. The forest of windmills would be 115 m tall and stretch for 15 km. Another huge development of 128 offshore turbines has also been proposed farther down the coast.

BirdLife International fears that many thousands of seabirds, wildfowl and waders could suffer if the wind farm plans become reality. Two species in particular could be particularly badly affected. The wind farms would be sited in the centre of the main Audouin's Gull *Larus audouinii* feeding area, a species endemic to the Mediterranean. At Punta de la Banya – less than 5 km away from the planned wind farms – a colony holding 60% of the world population can be found. Audouin's Gulls feed largely on sardines and other small fish in the rich waters off the Delta, and they do so mainly at night, making collisions with the turbines a significant threat. The species most likely to be affected, however, is the Balearic Shearwater *Puffinus mauretanicus*. This Critically Endangered seabird has a total world population of less than 6,000 individuals. Disturbance to a favoured feeding area, just offshore from the Delta, at the continental shelf poses a very real risk.

Alejandro Sanchez, executive director of BirdLife Spain said: 'The whole of the Ebro Delta, beyond the Natural Park, has been excluded by the Catalonian Government as a potential location for wind farms owing to its ecological value. Hence, it makes no sense to place them barely 5 km away from the most important seabird colonies in the Natural Park.'

Recent reports

Compiled by Barry Nightingale and Anthony McGeehan

This summary of unchecked reports covers mid July to mid August 2004.

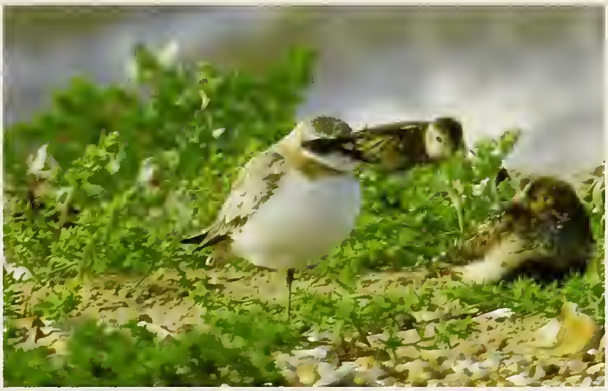
Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors* Trimley Marshes (Suffolk), 13th-31st July.

Fea's Petrel *Pterodroma feae* Galley Head (Co. Cork), 27th July. **Little Shearwater** *Puffinus assimilis* Pentire Point (Cornwall), 16th July. **Wilson's Storm-petrel** *Oceanites oceanicus* The following were seen during pelagic trips out from Scilly: up to three on 10th July; singles on 11th and 12th July; four on 13th July; singles on 31st July and 1st August; two on both 4th and 7th August; and at least three on 8th August. Elsewhere, one was seen in The Minch (Highland) on 21st July.

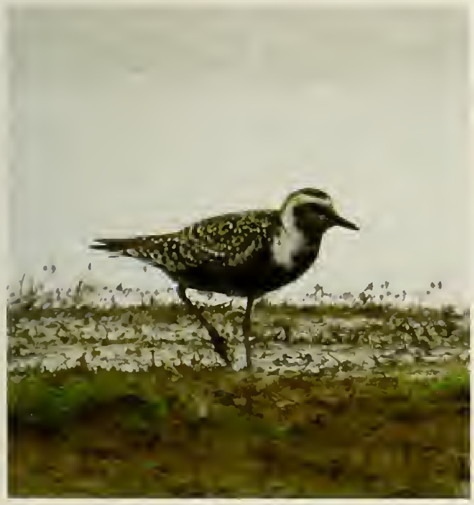
Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* Weir Wood Reservoir (East/West Sussex), 22nd-24th July; Dudley (West Midlands), 6th-8th August. **Great White Egret** *Ardea alba* North Slob, (Co. Wexford), 29th July. **Purple Heron** *Ardea purpurea* Hemsby (Norfolk), 14th July.

Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus* Dogsthorpe Star Pit (Cambridgeshire), 14th July.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* Sevenoaks Wildfowl Reserve (Kent), 30th July. **American Golden Plover** *Pluvialis dominica* Bure Marshes (Norfolk), 11th-12th July; Old Hall Marshes (Essex), 24th July to 4th August. **Pacific Golden Plover** *Pluvialis fulva* Spurn (East Yorkshire), 16th-17th July. **Great Knot** *Calidris tenuirostris* Skippool Creek, Wyre Estuary (Lancashire), 31st July. **Semipalmated Sandpiper** *Calidris pusilla* Brockholes Quarry (Lancashire), 25th July. **White-rumped Sandpiper** *Calidris fuscicollis* Trimley Marshes (Suffolk), 15th July; Kilcoole (Co. Wicklow), 2nd August; Langness (Isle of Man), 3rd-4th August; Keyhaven


Alan Tate

302. Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*, Snettisham, Norfolk, July 2004.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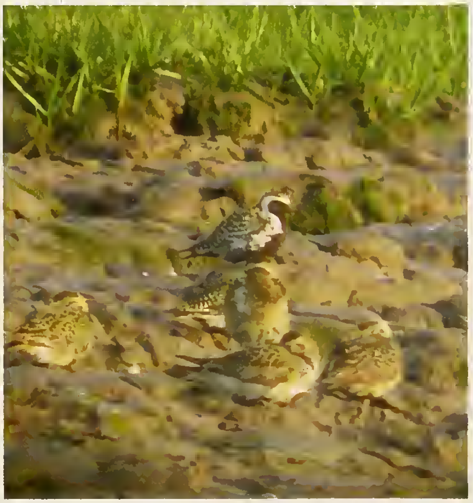
303. American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*, Old Hall Marshes, Essex, July 2004.


John hewitt

304. Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva* (furthest bird), Spurn, East Yorkshire, July 2004.

Marshes (Hampshire), 4th August. **Baird's Sandpiper** *Calidris bairdii* Tacumshin (Co. Wexford), 25th July. **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** *Calidris acuminata* Drift Reservoir (Cornwall), 6th-7th August. **Broad-billed Sandpiper** *Limicola falcinellus* Snettisham (Norfolk), 10th July; Bowling Green Marsh (Devon), 13th-16th July; Dawlish Warren (Devon), 16th-17th July; Ashton-on-Trent gravel-pits (Derbyshire), 18th July; Ythen Estuary (Northeast Scotland), 29th July. **Short-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus griseus* Tacumshin, long-stayer to 7th August at least. **Long-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus scolopaceus* Gibraltar Point (Lincolnshire), long-stayer to 8th August at least; Blennerville (Co. Kerry), 6th-7th August. **Marsh Sandpiper** *Tringa stagnatilis* Fobbing Marshes (Kent), 29th July to 7th August; Paull Holme Strays (East Yorkshire), 3rd August.

Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia* Dawlish Warren, 27th July. **Whiskered Tern** *Chlidonias hybrida* Gibraltar Point, 8th August. **White-winged Black Tern** *Chlidonias leucopterus* Rutland Water (Leicestershire), 11th July; Girton gravel-pits (Nottinghamshire), 20th July; Langford Lowfields (Nottinghamshire), 30th July; Pagham Lagoon (West Sussex), 30th-31st July; East Chevington (Northumberland), 5th August.

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* Pett Levels (East Sussex), 4th August. **Tawny Pipit** *Anthus campestris* Looe (Cornwall), 1st August; Hengistbury Head (Dorset), 7th August. **Aquatic Warbler** *Acrocephalus paludicola* One trapped at a private site in Kent on 2nd August; Farlington Marshes (Hampshire), 8th August. **Woodchat Shrike** *Lanius senator* Kennard Moor (Somerset), 21st July at least (and perhaps for a month earlier), to 8th August. **European Serin** *Serinus serinus* St Mary's (Scilly), 14th-16th July, two 17th, at least one remaining to 30th. **Black-headed Bunting** *Emberiza melanocephala* Shoreham-by-Sea (West Sussex), 17th July.

Paul Ellis

305. Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*, with Dunlins *C. alpina*, Skippool Creek, Wyre Estuary, Lancashire, July 2004.

Alan Tate

306. Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus*, Gibraltar Point, Lincolnshire, July 2004.

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307. Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*, Fobbing Marshes, Kent, July 2004.

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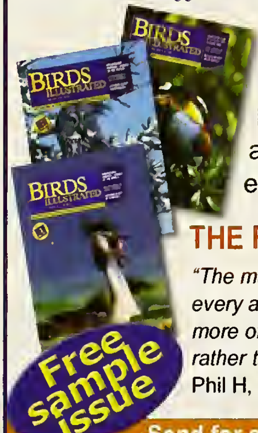

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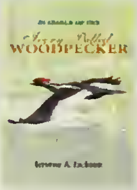

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Rare breeding birds in the United Kingdom in 2002

Malcolm Ogilvie and the Rare Breeding Birds Panel

This is the thirtieth annual report of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, which presents details of the status of Britain's rarest breeding birds for the year 2002. The totals are generally set out by county or region, occasionally by country; most actual localities are omitted, with the exception of those which are well known and previously publicised, usually protected reserves. Where county names are given, these are grouped within the Panel's ten regions (see pages 496-497).

The Panel

The current membership of the Panel is: Humphrey Crick, Ian Francis, Judith Smith, Ken Smith, David Stroud and Malcolm Ogilvie (Secretary). The individual members of the Panel serve in a personal capacity, but three of them are also able to reflect the interests and needs of the respective sponsoring bodies. The work of the Panel is supported financially by the JNCC (on behalf of the country conservation agencies) and the RSPB, with additional support coming from the BTO.

It was with deepest regret that the Panel learnt of the death of Colin Bibby on 7th August 2004. Colin had been a member of the Panel from 1990 until he resigned through ill health in April 2004. His knowledge and advice were invaluable and he played a significant part in the development of the Panel into a major source of information of conservation importance.

Coverage

The Panel collects records from the whole of the United Kingdom, including the Isle of Man and Northern Ireland, but not from the Channel Islands or the Republic of Ireland. The majority of the information presented here is submitted by County Recorders, with additional data from specialist groups and Schedule 1 licence forms received from the three country agencies. Coverage in 2002 was significantly better than in 2001, when foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) seriously interfered with normal survey work across the country. Nonetheless, there were still some gaps, with incomplete records from Caithness, Cornwall, the Isle of Man and Northern Ireland. With regard to the acceptance of records for publication, it is the Panel's policy to follow the opinions of the appropriate County Recorder and local committee, and only in exceptional cases to publish records which have not been vetted in this way.

In past years, we have included records of national rarities and scarce migrants, provided that they showed at least some signs of breeding-related behaviour. These included singing males, even if present just for a single day, but in potential breeding habitat. The justifications for doing so were that, firstly, this met the definition of possible breeding as recommended by the European Ornithological Atlas Committee, which the Panel follows; and secondly, that such records could, one day, show the preliminary steps towards a species' future colonisation. We have now decided to tighten up the application of these criteria and to publish only records of long-staying individuals doing rather more than just singing for a short period (though *all* such data will still be gratefully received and archived). Similarly, an attempt has been made to exclude from this report single birds of other species which are probably doing little more than just passing through a locality. For example, every year Garganeys *Anas querquedula* turn up in many potential breeding localities for a few days in April and then disappear. Such records are now largely excluded, though admittedly this is a matter of judgement rather than absolute certainty, and a judgement made first by the County Recorder when submitting the record and then by the Panel's Secretary in deciding whether to publish it.

Review of the year 2002

Both spring and summer were warmer and drier than in some recent years, with March and April in particular experiencing above-average temperatures. The first half of May was cooler, with persistent northerly winds, but in most areas there was a welcome absence of the heavy spring rainfall that produced such damaging flooding of some inland localities in several previous years, and affected ground-nesting waders particularly badly. Brief spells of cyclonic weather in late April and mid May were not sufficient to cause significant problems. The weather in June and July was more mixed, though still with above-average temperatures, especially in southern Britain. Conversely, northern Scotland suffered a wet and windy summer which depressed the breeding success of some species.

Wildfowl

No fewer than five pairs of Whooper Swans *Cygnus cygnus* nested successfully in Ayrshire, Shetland and the Western Isles. Although it is not known whether any of the birds were injured and thus unable to migrate to Iceland, this species is now breeding regularly in small numbers and, for the last three years at least, successfully. Scattered breeding by Eurasian Wigeons *Anas penelope* in southern and eastern England may indicate some southward spread of this species' regular breeding range, though again the possibility of escaped or released birds being involved cannot be ruled out. The number of pairs of Gadwalls *A. strepera* reported was the highest ever and reflects both good coverage and a genuine increase in several counties. The national total of breeding Pintails *A. acuta* depends heavily on the extent of survey coverage in their main stronghold in Orkney, which was incomplete this year. Elsewhere, the presence of five pairs in the Western Isles, two of which definitely bred, was notable. It was, however, a poor year for Garganey, even allowing for modification of the criteria for inclusion mentioned above, although one pair got as far as the Western Isles and bred there. Numbers of Common Pochards *Aythya ferina* were almost back to the level of 2000, following the access restrictions of 2001, but this remains a difficult species to count in those areas with a network of reservoirs and gravel-pits. A pair of Greater Scaups *A. marila* was seen displaying in Argyll; although thought not to have bred, this is the first record of this species since 1999. Similarly, it is over ten years since Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis* was last included in these reports, but a pair was seen in suitable habitat in the Western Isles in early June. The Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula* nestbox schemes in Badenoch and Strathspey (Highland) were surveyed more completely than for several years in 2002, giving rise to a tentative Scottish population estimate of c. 150 egg-laying females. Numbers of birds summering in England continue to increase slowly, notably in Herefordshire, where the regularity of occurrence has encouraged a local nestbox scheme which may yet lead to a small breeding population.

Divers to Eurasian Spoonbill

Red-throated Divers *Gavia stellata* on Shetland and Orkney had a mixed season with breeding success up in some areas but down in others compared with 2001. The number of successful two-chick broods in Shetland was low, suggesting continuing problems with food supply (which is predominantly Lesser Sandeels *Ammodytes marinus*). Monitoring of Black-throated Divers *G. arctica* returned to normal levels in 2002, as did the number of available rafts, following the twin problems of access to sites and of getting rafts back on the water after winter maintenance in 2001. Over half of all known sites in Scotland were visited during the season. The productivity of raft nests was the highest since 1998 and, as usual, significantly better than at natural sites.

Following the first successful breeding by Red-necked Grebes *Podiceps grisegena* in the UK in 2001, it is disappointing to have to report that only a single adult appeared at the breeding site in 2002, one of only two records of summering adults this year. The number of breeding pairs of Slavonian Grebes *P. auritus* and the number of young raised increased for the third and fourth years running, respectively, although the number of localities with breeding birds fell slightly and is now less than half that reported in the early 1990s. The fact that half the breeding pairs occurred at a single site, Loch Ruthven, in Inverness-shire, is a cause for some concern but does enable effective conservation management to be carried out and it is no coincidence that this one site accounted for 64% of all young reared. Although the number of confirmed breeding pairs of Black-necked Grebes *P. nigricollis* reached a new record high, both the number of localities and the total pairs fell. A similarity with the previous species is shown by the fact that one site, Woolston, in Cheshire, is responsible for about 40% of the confirmed pairs.

Although Leach's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa* has been a Panel species since 1996, when the complete list of Schedule 1 species was adopted, it has not previously appeared in these reports. The recent publication of the results of Seabird 2000 (Mitchell *et al.* 2004) presents an opportunity to rectify this omission. Since the population had never been properly counted before, it is not possible to consider any trends, merely to report that the total number of adults on nests in the UK was a fraction over 48,000, on 15 individual islands, all in Scotland.

Eurasian Bitterns *Botaurus stellaris* continue to do well, with further increases in the number of both booming males (from 32 to 37) and booming localities (from 18 to 23). Little Egrets *Egretta garzetta* are now firmly established across much of southern England and East Anglia and continue to spread slowly northwards, including this year to North Wales. Accurate counting of breeding pairs is proving difficult in some of the larger colonies and where the birds are nesting among Grey Herons *Ardea cinerea*. By contrast, and following successful breeding in northern England in 1999, Eurasian Spoonbills *Platalea leucorodia* appear to be marking time in the UK, with nest-building activity by several birds at one site in Suffolk, though it is not thought that any eggs were laid.

Raptors

The numbers of Honey-buzzards *Pernis apivorus* reported in 2002 fell quite markedly and, significantly, this appears due not just to less intensive coverage of some areas but to fewer birds being found where coverage was good. Monitoring of the Welsh Red Kite *Milvus milvus* population was back to normal after the FMD restrictions in 2001. The total number of pairs was only one more than in 2000, suggesting that estimates for 2001 may have been too high. Discounting those estimates, however, the number of breeding pairs, successful pairs and young reared all reached new peaks, even though little more than one-third of the estimated territory-holding pairs could be checked. Furthermore, breeding success was at the lower end of the range with some weather-related losses. The three re-established populations in England all did well, with pairs now spreading outside the Chilterns and Northamptonshire release areas. Similarly, those in the central Scotland release area also did well, with 15 pairs laying compared with ten in 2001. Releases in Dumfries & Galloway continued and the first signs of breeding, stick-carrying and attempted copulation, were noted. The population in the north of Scotland continues to increase, but extremely slowly and recruitment remains poor. There were, however, no confirmed cases of poisoning in the area for the first time since 1995. Although the number of pairs (or trios) of White-tailed Eagles *Haliaeetus albicilla* increased again, only eight of 22 pairs which laid successfully managed to rear young, with natural causes (especially some ill-timed spells of wind and rain) taking a higher than usual toll.

Overall, Marsh Harriers *Circus aeruginosus* were slightly down on the record levels in 2001 (see *Brit. Birds* 97: 210), owing to a marked decrease in Norfolk, but numbers in several other areas increased, and the minimum number of young fledged exceeded 500 for the first time. Breeding took place in four counties in Scotland, confirming the gradual increase and spread taking place there. Sample monitoring of Hen Harriers *C. cyaneus* covered just over 50% of the probable total, and suggested that breeding success was the lowest recorded since the Panel began reporting on this species in 1996, with only ten occupied territories in the whole of northern England. The number of sites where Montagu's Harriers *C. pygargus* were recorded was at a ten-year low in 2002, though productivity of the few pairs that did breed was better than average. Monitoring of Northern Goshawks *Accipiter gentilis* continues to present problems and, with some observers reluctant to pass on even basic information on the numbers of pairs in their study areas, the published figures are seriously incomplete. Golden Eagles *Aquila chrysaetos* were similarly poorly covered in several areas, a situation which will be remedied when the results of the national census carried out in 2003 are available; in 2002, breeding success, albeit from a smaller than usual sample, was slightly below that of the two previous years. Ospreys *Pandion haliaetus* increased, as they have done every year for two decades, though it is getting noticeably harder to find all the pairs in the core area of northern and central Scotland. Away from there, colonisation is taking place steadily, with five pairs in Argyll, four in the Borders and one in Dumfries & Galloway. For the second year running there were three pairs in Cumbria, though only one was successful, while at Rutland Water one pair bred unsuccessfully.

Merlin *Falco columbarius* monitoring was less complete than usual, although breeding success was the best since 1997, while the number of breeding Hobbies *F. subbuteo* fell for the second year running. In contrast, a national census of Peregrine Falcons *F. peregrinus* was carried out in 2002; the summary totals by area are given in the species account and compared with the last census, in 1991. Overall, there has been a 13% increase in numbers to 1,492 occupied territories, but while Peregrines have increased throughout almost the whole of England and Wales, parts of Scotland, especially in the north and west, showed evidence of a marked decline.

Spotted Crake, Corn Crake and Common Crane

Spotted Crakes *Porzana porzana* had a poor year in 2002, but numbers of Corn Crakes *Crex crex* reached their highest level for at least the last 15 years, a statistic fuelled by increases on 12 of the 19 islands or island groups which comprise the core part of their range in north-west Scotland, and despite further declines on the Scottish mainland. The tiny population of Common Cranes *Grus grus* in Norfolk bred successfully, while two separate summering pairs in Yorkshire give a glimmer of hope that this species' future in the UK is not entirely dependent on east Norfolk.

Waders

Avocets *Recurvirostra avosetta* continue to take eastern England by storm, with record numbers of colonies and breeding pairs although productivity at those sites at which it was measured was again poor. Another flagship wader, the Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*, also reached a new record high in 2002, despite access problems hampering monitoring in the Brecks. Also like Avocets, however, it appeared that this cheering news was tempered with lower breeding success than in recent years. Little Ringed Plovers *Charadrius dubius* continue to decline, with habitat loss, either directly through development or indirectly because of increased disturbance from recreational activities, likely to be the most important factor. Breeding success at Welney, in Norfolk, was increased through the use of wire-mesh cages placed over nests as soon as egg-laying had taken place, which was effective in reducing predation from Red Foxes *Vulpes vulpes*, Common Coots *Fulica atra* and gulls *Larus* (see also *Brit. Birds* 96: 344-346); such management may become increasingly important for this attractive species. The number of confirmed pairs of Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa* was the third-highest since 1980, and a welcome absence of late-spring flooding, a major problem in recent years, allowed improved productivity at one key site in Cambridgeshire. Finally, Red-necked Phalaropes *Phalaropus lobatus* in Shetland had a good year, with more young reared than in either 2000 or 2001, while reports of phalaropes at as many as seven suitable localities in the Western Isles is certainly encouraging.

Gulls and terns

The number of Mediterranean Gulls *Larus melanocephalus* breeding in England declined, largely because of a sharp decrease at the major Hampshire colony, for which no obvious reason is known. The minimum number of young reared (30) was, however, the same as in 2001. A considerable increase in Roseate Terns *Sterna dougallii*, due largely to the expansion of the colony at Coquet Island in Northumberland by 35%, was excellent news. As with several other species in this report, however, the national total is heavily dependent on one key breeding site, with all the other colonies being small and, consequently, vulnerable. After a particularly good year in 2001, numbers of Little Terns *Sterna albifrons* declined somewhat, but still remain 15% higher than in 1997, the first year in which the Panel collected breeding data.

Barn Owl, Common Kingfisher, European Bee-eater and Wryneck

Monitoring of Barn Owls *Tyto alba* and Common Kingfishers *Alcedo atthis* was reasonably successful, with the highest-recorded total for the latter. One or two counties have begun more detailed surveying of Common Kingfishers, something which the Panel has been urging for some time. Among other things, they are an excellent indicator species for the general health of river and stream systems. The first breeding in the UK by European Bee-eaters *Merops apiaster* for more than 50 years caused considerable excitement in Co. Durham, while a singing male Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*, apparently holding territory in Hampshire, was at least marginally better than the complete blank in 2001.

Passerines

Survey work in 2002 suggested that Wood Larks *Lullula arborea* are declining in some areas, and that a long period of population growth may be slowing down or even levelling off elsewhere, although counts were incomplete in Hampshire, and possibly also in the Brecks. A careful survey of Black Redstarts *Phoenicurus ochruros* in the London area helped to produce the highest total of pairs since 1997.

Cetti's Warblers *Cettia cetti* reached a new record total, and increased in many counties, especially in southern England. Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides* continues to maintain a toe-hold in east and southeast England, and was found in four counties, although no confirmed breeding records were reported. In contrast, Marsh Warblers *Acrocephalus palustris* had their worst year in the past three decades, and the species' future as a breeding bird in Britain must be in some doubt. Reports of Dartford Warblers *Sylvia undata* were incomplete but, aside from known gaps, the decline in Devon continued, counter-balanced by increases in other counties. Firecrests *Regulus ignicapilla* were present in good numbers in several areas, and the total was the second highest recorded.

The first-ever national census of Bearded Tits *Panurus biarmicus* took place in 2002 and while the results are still preliminary it appears that the population, of 504-559 pairs, is significantly higher than previously estimated. This reflects continued increases in several areas, particularly in East Anglia. Golden Orioles *Oriolus oriolus* continue to decline, the four confirmed and four possible pairs in 2002 comprising the lowest number recorded since the 1970s. Red-billed Choughs *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* nested in Cornwall for the first time in 50 years. Elsewhere they were, as usual, monitored in selected areas only, but these suggested that breeding productivity was quite high. Finally, Bramblings *Fringilla montifringilla* bred in northern Scotland for the second year running, while the first estimate of Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus* numbers for four years suggested an increase of about 27% in the number of breeding pairs.

Conservation uses of Panel data

It is the Panel's policy to make data available for relevant conservation uses. As well as site-specific information (e.g. for the review of Special Protection Areas by JNCC and the country conservation agencies), national datasets have been used by the RSPB for planning surveys. The Panel's data have also played a key role in national population estimates and in the development and implementation of recovery plans for certain species. The publication *The state of the UK's birds 2003* (Eaton *et al.* 2004) makes extensive use of the Panel's data, as does the recently revised 'The population status of birds in the UK' (Gregory *et al.* 2002).

Publications

The bibliography at the end of this report gives details of published results of censuses and surveys of the numbers and distribution of Panel species, many of these making use of the Panel's data.

Key to geographical regions used in this report

The counties or areas given below are, as far as possible, the names used by the local recorders who sent the Panel their information.

England, SW
Avon, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Isles of Scilly, Somerset, Wiltshire

England, SE
Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Kent, London & Middlesex, Oxfordshire, Surrey, Sussex (East and West)

England, E
Cambridgeshire, Huntingdon & Peterborough, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Northamptonshire, Suffolk

England, Central
Derbyshire, Herefordshire, Leicestershire (including Rutland), Nottinghamshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, West Midlands, Worcestershire

England, N
Cheshire & Wirral, Cleveland, Cumbria, Co. Durham, Greater Manchester, Isle of Man, Lancashire & North Merseyside, Northumberland, Tyne & Wear, Yorkshire (North, South and West)

Wales
The Watsonian vice-counties of Anglesey (Môn), Brecon (Brycheiniog), Caernarfon, Carmarthen (Caerfyrddin), Ceredigion, Denbigh (Dinbych), Flint (Fflint), Glamorgan (Morgannwg) (following the Welsh Bird Report, this recording area includes East Glamorgan and Gower), Gwent, Meirionnydd, Montgomery (Trefaldwyn), Pembroke (Penfro), Radnor (Maesyfed)

Scotland, S
The local bird-recording areas of Ayrshire, Borders, Clyde (comprising West and East Dunbartonshire including that part now in Argyll & Bute, North and South Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, City of Glasgow, Inverclyde, Stirling–Clyde drainage), Clyde Islands (Arran, the Cumbraes, Bute), Dumfries & Galloway, Lothian

Scotland, Mid
The local bird-recording areas of Angus & Dundee, Fife, Forth (Clackmannanshire, Falkirk, Stirling), Perth & Kinross, Northeast Scotland (Aberdeenshire), Moray & Nairn

Scotland, N & W
The local bird-recording areas of Argyll & Bute (except Bute and former West Dunbartonshire), Caithness, Highland (Badenoch & Strathspey, Inverness, Ross & Cromarty, Sutherland), Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles

Northern Ireland
Co. Antrim, Co. Armagh, Co. Down, Co. Fermanagh, Co. Londonderry, Co. Tyrone

Terminology

The definitions of 'Confirmed breeding', 'Probable breeding' and 'Possible breeding' used in the Panel's reports follow those recommended by the European Ornithological Atlas Committee. Within tables, the abbreviations 'Confirmed pairs' and 'Max. total pairs' mean, respectively, 'Number of pairs confirmed breeding' and 'Number of pairs confirmed *plus* possible/probable pairs breeding'.

Within each species account, numbers given in the format '1-4 pairs' indicate (in this case) one proven breeding pair and a possible maximum total of four breeding pairs.

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*

Five localities: five pairs bred. Only those pairs which actually bred have been included in the statistics. In addition, up to 40 summering birds were reported from localities in Highland, Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles. Most of these were single birds (though some were apparently paired), and included a few which are known to be unable to fly. Records of known escapes are now included in the Panel's report on non-native breeding birds (*Brit. Birds* 97: in press). It is admittedly not always easy to determine whether some Whooper Swans are of wild origin. The pair which bred in Ayrshire in 2002 is one such case; they nested within the regular wintering range of Icelandic Whooper Swans, yet their wild origin cannot be absolutely certain.

Scotland, S

AYRSHIRE One locality: pair bred, two young reared; second pair did not breed.

Scotland, N & W

SHETLAND Two localities: (1) pair bred, hatched five eggs and reared four young; (2) pair bred, laying five eggs, but none hatched. WESTERN ISLES Two localities: (1) pair seen with one young; (2) pair hatched three eggs but no young reared.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*

The following breeding reports were received.

England, SW

HAMPSHIRE Pair and a single summered at two localities. SOMERSET Single pairs possibly bred at two localities; up to 14 birds summered at four other localities.

England, SE

BEDFORDSHIRE Singles summered at two localities. ESSEX Pair bred, two pairs summered. KENT Nine pairs present, but none thought to have bred. SUSSEX Pair bred.

England, E

CAMBRIDGESHIRE 19 pairs at two localities, no broods seen. NORFOLK Pair bred; up to 40 summering birds at 12 localities. SUFFOLK 1-10 birds at five localities, breeding not suspected.

England, Central

DERBYSHIRE Seven birds summered at two localities. LEICESTERSHIRE Pair summered. NOTTINGHAMSHIRE Five birds summered at two localities. STAFFORDSHIRE One summered.

England, N

CHESHIRE & WIRRAL Up to 12 birds summered at six localities. NORTHUMBERLAND Five pairs reared 27 young at one locality; pair reared four young at second.

Wales

CAERNARFON Three singles summered. MEIRIONNYDD Single bird summered.

Scotland, S

BORDERS Three pairs probably bred.

Scotland, Mid

FIFE Pair bred. FORTH Singles at two localities. NORTHEAST SCOTLAND Breeding confirmed at two localities. PERTH & KINROSS At least nine pairs present at four sites, but breeding not proved.

Scotland, N & W

ARGYLL Pair summered at one locality, single males summered at two others. HIGHLAND Ten pairs present at one locality, three pairs bred at a second and 15 summering males at a third. ORKNEY 26 pairs bred at four localities, three pairs present at two other sites. SHETLAND Pair present at one locality.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

The maximum total reported, 1,123 pairs, is the highest total yet recorded.

England, SW

245 pairs. AVON 6. DEVON 7. DORSET 12. HAMPSHIRE 53. SOMERSET 160. WILTSHIRE 7.

England, SE

144 pairs. BEDFORDSHIRE 4. BERKSHIRE 10. KENT 112. SURREY 4. SUSSEX 14.

England, E

320 pairs. CAMBRIDGESHIRE 125. HUNTINGDON & PETERBOROUGH 20. NORFOLK 102. SUFFOLK 73.

England, Central

82-84 pairs. DERBYSHIRE 19. LEICESTERSHIRE 28. NOTTINGHAMSHIRE No count, but bred at five localities. SHROPSHIRE 3. STAFFORDSHIRE 6. WARWICKSHIRE 18-20. WORCESTERSHIRE 3.

England, N

143 pairs. CHESHIRE & WIRRAL 10. CLEVELAND 8. GREATER MANCHESTER 9. LANCASHIRE & NORTH MERSEYSIDE 7. NORTHUMBERLAND 12. YORKSHIRE 97.

Wales

49 pairs. ANGLESEY 37. CARMARTHEN 10. PEMBROKE 2.

Scotland, S

6 pairs. BORDERS 6.

Scotland, Mid

104 pairs. ANGUS & DUNDEE 4. PERTH & KINROSS 100.

Scotland, N & W

27-28 pairs. ARGYLL 1. ORKNEY 15. SHETLAND 1-2. WESTERN ISLES 10.

Pintail *Anas acuta*

22 localities: 6-26 pairs breeding. Coverage in Orkney was incomplete, but several important sites were visited. In addition to the pairs listed below, single males or females were quite widely reported during May-July.

England, SE

KENT One locality: pair summered, breeding not confirmed.

England, E

CAMBRIDGESHIRE One locality: two pairs, breeding not confirmed. SUFFOLK One locality: pair in May.

England, N

CHESHIRE & WIRRAL One locality: pair in June, but no evidence of breeding.

Wales

PEMBROKE One locality: pair bred, six young seen, but none fledged.

Scotland, Mid

PERTH & KINROSS One locality: pair bred, eight young seen, fledging success not reported.

Scotland, N & W

ARGYLL One locality: pair probably bred and failed. HIGHLAND One locality: pair present in summer. ORKNEY Nine localities: (1)(2) single pairs proved breeding; (3) 3-4 pairs probably bred; (4) 12 males and one female in suitable habitat; (5)-(9) single pairs present, no evidence of breeding. WESTERN ISLES Five localities: (1)(2) single pairs bred; (3)-(5) single pairs present.

Pintail	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
No. localities	23	49	25	33	22	28	25	15	12	22
Confirmed pairs	4	20	11	8	5	13	22	10	1	6
Max. total pairs	47	76	45	53	33	50	37	26	30	26

Garganey *Anas querquedula*

32 localities: 16-55 pairs breeding. A poor year, although more rigorous criteria for publishing records were introduced this year (see above), in particular by omitting pairs present at suitable sites for short periods (and thus presumably migrants). The successful breeding in the Western Isles is noteworthy.

England, SW

Five localities: 1-11 pairs. AVON One locality: one pair. DEVON Two localities: one pair bred, plus one pair. SOMERSET Two localities: eight pairs in total, with probable breeding by some.

England, SE

11 localities: 9-18 pairs. BEDFORDSHIRE One locality: one pair. KENT Eight localities: six pairs bred, eight other pairs. SUSSEX Two localities: three pairs bred.

England, E

Ten localities: 4-20 pairs. CAMBRIDGESHIRE Three localities: two pairs bred, 11 other pairs. NORFOLK Three localities: three pairs. SUFFOLK Four localities: two pairs bred, plus two pairs.

England, Central

One locality: 0-1 pairs. STAFFORDSHIRE One locality: one pair.

England, N

One locality: one pair. LANCASHIRE & NORTH MERSEYSIDE One locality: pair bred.

Wales

One locality: 0-1 pairs. ANGLESEY One locality: one pair.

Scotland, Mid

One locality: 0-1 pairs. PERTH & KINROSS One locality: one pair.

Scotland, N & W

Two localities: 1-2 pairs. ORKNEY One locality: one pair. WESTERN ISLES One locality: pair bred.

Garganey	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
No. localities	73	65	80	60	85	86	77	52	52	32
Confirmed pairs	14	13	9	15	10	22	37	30	9	16
Max. total pairs	163	111	117	78	129	144	108	109	84	55

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*

499 pairs.

England, SW

30 pairs. AVON 6. DORSET 2. HAMPSHIRE 2. SOMERSET 19. WILTSHIRE 1.

England, SE

313 pairs. BEDFORDSHIRE 2. BERKSHIRE 1. ESSEX 98. KENT 208. SUSSEX 4.

England, E

55 pairs. NORFOLK 42. SUFFOLK 13.

England, Central

12 pairs. LEICESTERSHIRE 1. NOTTINGHAMSHIRE 10. WORCESTERSHIRE 1.

England, N

59 pairs. CHESHIRE & WIRRAL 11. CLEVELAND 5. GREATER MANCHESTER 6. LANCASHIRE & NORTH MERSEYSIDE 12. NORTHUMBERLAND 6. YORKSHIRE 19.

Wales

18 pairs. ANGLESEY 18.

Scotland, S

5 pairs. BORDERS 5.

Scotland, Mid

5 pairs. PERTH & KINROSS 5.

Scotland, N & W

2 pairs. ORKNEY 2.

Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*

One locality: 0-1 pairs. This is the first report of this species since 1999, when a pair bred in Northern Ireland.

Scotland, N & W

ARGYLL One locality. A pair was discovered in June, when display was observed. The female remained until late July, but there was no evidence of breeding.

Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis*

One locality: 0-1 pairs. The last time Long-tailed Duck appeared in these reports was in 1991, while the last time that a pair was seen in suitable breeding habitat in summer may have been as long ago as 1969, when breeding was suspected in the Western Isles.

Scotland, N & W

WESTERN ISLES One locality: pair in suitable habitat in early June, but not seen thereafter.

Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra*

Seven localities or areas: 2-25 pairs. The last full census was in 1995 (Underhill *et al.* 1998), when the British & Irish population was estimated to be 195 pairs. Only casual records are available for 2002.

Scotland, Mid

Two localities: pair bred, up to five other pairs.

Scotland, N & W

ARGYLL Four localities: (1) pair bred; (2) up to five or six pairs present; (3) up to three pairs present; (4) pair present. HIGHLAND One area: eight pairs present.

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*

Approximately 150 pairs. A thorough survey of the Strathspey area of Scotland was carried out in 2002, resulting in a more up-to-date population estimate than we have been able to provide for several years. Meanwhile, the trend of a slow increase in summering birds in England and Wales continues.

England, Central

Five localities: 0-12 pairs. DERBYSHIRE One locality: pair summered. HEREFORDSHIRE One locality: four males and seven females in April, nestbox scheme in place, but no breeding reported. NOTTINGHAMSHIRE Two localities: three summering females and one immature male. WARWICKSHIRE One locality: one summering male.

England, N

Four localities: 0-4 pairs. GREATER MANCHESTER Four localities: summering by four males and three females.

Wales

One locality: 0-3 pairs. ANGLESEY One locality: one pair then two females in June.

Scotland, Mid

Two localities: 0-2 pairs. PERTH & KINROSS Two localities: (1) two pairs, may have bred; (2) up to 40 summering birds, though no evidence of breeding and omitted from the totals.

Scotland, N & W

91+ pairs. HIGHLAND A survey throughout Badenoch and Strathspey, including the nestbox schemes at the RSPB reserves of Insh Marshes and Abernethy, found a minimum of 91 clutches, though 33 of these, all laid in nestboxes, were not incubated; these may be linked to multiple laying by more than one female in some boxes. From these data, a tentative estimate of the Scottish breeding population is of c. 150 egg-laying females. Searches for breeding pairs outside Strathspey found only two nests. (Data from the Goldeneye Study Group, 2002 breeding-season newsletter.)

Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*

Three pairs bred, plus 303 singing males. Almost back to the level of 1999, after two poor years, but the number of singing males is still well below the peak counts of the 1990s. The recovery was particularly noticeable in Scotland. The following list refers to singing males unless stated otherwise.

England, SW

65 males. AVON 4. DEVON 3. DORSET 24. HAMPSHIRE 7. SOMERSET 6. WILTSHIRE 21.

England, SE

42 males. BEDFORDSHIRE 1. BERKSHIRE 9. BUCKINGHAMSHIRE 2. ESSEX 8. KENT 9. SUSSEX 13.

England, E

34 males. CAMBRIDGESHIRE 2. HUNTINGDON & PETERBOROUGH 3. NORFOLK 23. SUFFOLK 6.

England, Central

39 males. DERBYSHIRE 2. LEICESTERSHIRE 11. NOTTINGHAMSHIRE 11. SHROPSHIRE 15.

England, N

50 males. CHESHIRE & WIRRAL 15. GREATER MANCHESTER 1. LANCASHIRE & NORTH MERSEYSIDE 13. NORTHUMBERLAND 21.

Wales

4 males. ANGLESEY 1. BRECON 1. GLAMORGAN 1. PEMBROKESHIRE 1.

Scotland, S

4 males. BORDERS 4.

Scotland, Mid

Three confirmed breeding records, 41 males. ANGUS & DUNDEE One confirmed breeding and three singing males. AYR 2. FIFE 5. MORAY & NAIRN 13. NORTHEAST SCOTLAND Two confirmed breeding and 18 singing males.

Scotland, N & W

24 males. ARGYLL 4. HIGHLAND 5. ORKNEY 6. SHETLAND 9.

Common Quail	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Confirmed broods	1	8	15	5	4	5	5	2	4	3
No. singing males	203	612	515	335	867	528	317	203	223	306

Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*

The results of long-term monitoring in Orkney and Shetland are set out below. Casual breeding observations elsewhere are not listed.

Scotland, N & W

ORKNEY On Hoy, a whole-island survey found 63 occupied sites, of which 37 were successful, producing 41 young (0.65 chicks per occupied site); on Mainland, 12 pairs at five localities reared eight young, but fledging success was not reported for four pairs which all hatched chicks at another locality; on Rousay, six pairs at four localities reared only one young; on Eday, eight pairs nested but success was unknown. The season was less successful than in 2001, but better than in 2000.

SHETLAND At Hermaness, Unst, six pairs reared five young; at Lumbister, Yell, 11 pairs reared five young; on Fetlar, 24 pairs reared 22 young; on Foula, 10 pairs reared two young. Elsewhere, in other regular study areas, it was apparently a poor year in terms of the number of successful pairs.

STRATHCLYDE A complete survey of Islay found eight pairs with eggs, the most found in one year; one pair known to have reared two young, while other sites were not revisited.

Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica*

After the restricted survey in 2001 (see *Brit. Birds* 96: 482), the number of territories monitored in 2002 increased to 98, while raft numbers were back to normal levels. In total, 43 out of 50 raft territories were occupied and 35 raft-nesting pairs fledged 18 chicks. A further six pairs nested within these territories using natural sites and fledged one chick. Thirty-two territories without rafts were occupied, from which only six chicks were reared.

Year	Sites monitored	Sites occupied	Rafts used/ available	Young fledged (mean chicks per pair) Rafts	Natural	Total	Production ratio: raft site to natural site
1996	120	96	27/45	19 (0.70)	28 (0.41)	47 (0.49)	1.7
1997	98	82	32/41	17 (0.53)	12 (0.10)	29 (0.35)	5.3
1998	114	82	38/45	19 (0.50)	12 (0.28)	31 (0.38)	1.8
1999	90	77	38/48	14 (0.37)	7 (0.27)	21 (0.27)	1.4
2000	93	83	33/57	14 (0.42)	13 (0.33)	27 (0.33)	1.3
2001	51	51	19/unknown	4 (0.21)	8 (0.25)	12 (0.24)	0.8
2002	98	75	43/50	18 (0.42)	7 (0.18)	25 (0.31)	2.3

Note: owing to slight changes in methodology, productivity at natural sites in 2002 is not strictly comparable with past years.

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*

Two localities in two counties: two adults in summer plumage. This constitutes an extremely disappointing year following the first successful breeding in the UK in 2001.

England, E

One locality: breeding-plumaged adult at usual site, 31st March to at least 2nd June.

Scotland, S

One locality: only a single breeding-plumaged adult appeared at the 2001 breeding site; present from 8th March to 25th June.

Slavonian Grebe *Podiceps auritus*

16 localities: 46 pairs breeding, fledging 36 young, resulting in breeding productivity of 0.78 young per territorial pair, the fourth highest ever recorded.

Scotland, Mid and N & W

16 localities: (1) Loch Ruthven: 23 pairs present and all probably bred, rearing 23 young; (2)-(16) 23 pairs reared 13 young. A further two sites held single birds only.

Slavonian Grebe	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
No. localities	33	32	31	24	22	25	24	15	18	16
Confirmed pairs	73	51	58	49	53	42	35	31	40	46
Young reared	25	30	46	17	15	16	12	33	34	36
Young/territorial pair	0.34	0.59	0.79	0.35	0.28	0.38	0.34	1.06	0.85	0.78

Stuart Benn, RSPB, has commented as follows: 'The welcome increase from the record low of 2000 continued, although the recent (and worrying) trend in the contraction of the number of sites used showed no sign of improvement. Loch Ruthven remained the best site by far, with 50% of the breeding pairs and 64% of the fledged young. Overall, productivity was lower than in 2000 and 2001, but still well above the long-term average of 0.58 young per territorial pair.

'Although strenuous efforts are made each year to try to count the entire UK population of Slavonian Grebes, there is always the concern that some rarely visited lochs have been colonised and birds are being missed. To counter this, all lochs in the core range (within about 65 km of Inverness) are checked periodically. In excess of 300 lochs were visited in 2002, and no unknown sites were found.

'With a bird of such restricted numbers and range it is relatively straightforward to count them each year, but it has proved rather more difficult to identify the reasons behind the observed population changes; the RSPB has continued its research into these issues.

'Recent breeding seasons have been good but, on average, our grebes produce fewer young than those in Iceland and Norway and predation has been suggested as a possible cause. To this end, tiny cameras were deployed overlooking grebe nests and the results relayed to videotape. Later analysis of the tape established whether the nest had failed and, if so, how. A small number of nests were predated (see, for example, *Brit. Birds* 95: 390-391), but the majority were either successful or failed through natural causes. Most important among these in 2002 were wave action or flooding during a particularly wet and windy summer in northern Scotland. Losses of chicks after they have left the nest still appear to be high and further work is needed to identify the reasons for this.

'Realistic conservation efforts are also severely hampered by a lack of knowledge of some other key aspects of the grebes' lives. For example, we do not know where Scottish birds spend the winter, what proportion of "Scottish" birds return here in subsequent years or how our population relates to those

Ray Scally

Slavonian Grebes *Podiceps auritus*

elsewhere in Europe. In Iceland, where the number of pairs is increasing rapidly, 2002 was a bumper season and it would be useful to know whether Scotland can expect some knock-on effect from the Icelandic population in the future. To find out more about the movements of birds, a programme of catching and colour-ringing grebes was started in 2001 by dazzling them on one of the lochs where the birds move to moult. Three birds (two adults and a juvenile) were caught and all of these returned to Scotland in 2002, two to Loch Ruthven (where one of the two ringed as adults reared a chick). The remaining adult was found paired at another site and was thought to have laid and failed. This pair then moved 30 km to a site where they relaid; this time they bred successfully, and reared two young. These findings are important for two reasons: they show that at least some birds return to Scotland and that the catching process was not harmful to the birds. A further seven birds were caught in autumn 2002.'

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*

26 localities in 14 counties: 50-65 pairs bred. Although there were some gaps in coverage, which may have led to the maximum total being lower than some in recent years, the record numbers at Woolston, in Cheshire, helped raise the number of confirmed breeding pairs to 50, the highest ever in these reports. Twenty breeding pairs were reported at Woolston, although no fewer than 52 adults were counted on 30th April 2002, which is thought to be one of the largest counts ever at a breeding site in the UK. Judith Smith and Brian Martin have commented that these data highlight the need for a study of why Black-necked Grebes at a few sites are consistently successful, while at most sites in the UK the number of young that fledge is low. Factors likely to be important are the presence or absence of predators (particularly American Mink *Mustela vison*, Brown Rats *Rattus norvegicus* and Red-eared Terrapins *Chrysemys scripta elegans*) and/or whether these can be controlled, and also water stability – the latter may well become more critical in a period when global warming seems to be producing a greater number of flash-flooding events.

England, SW

Two localities: 0-2 pairs. AVON One locality: pair in summer plumage in April, but did not breed. HAMPSHIRE One locality: single bird present in May and June.

England, SE

Five localities: 2-5 pairs. ESSEX One locality: pair bred. KENT Four localities: (1) pair bred, juvenile seen in June; (2)(3) pairs present in June; (4) breeding-plumaged bird seen in May in potential breeding habitat.

England, Central

Four localities: 4-5 pairs. NOTTINGHAMSHIRE Three localities: (1) two pairs produced 3-4 young; (2) pair with one young in July, but not thought to have bred at this site; (3) pair present in March-April and again May-July. STAFFORDSHIRE One locality: pair laid late in season, clutch failed to hatch.

England, N

Nine localities: 34-40 pairs. CHESHIRE & WIRRAL Two localities: (1) Woolston: at least 20 breeding pairs, with up to 27 juveniles seen at one time, though only seven fledged; (2) two pairs in April, five adults in early July, but no breeding attempted. GREATER MANCHESTER Two localities: (1) two or three pairs fledged at least five young; (2) pair present, but did not breed. NORTHUMBERLAND Three localities: (1) nine pairs built platforms, seven pairs produced 12 young, two pairs failed, but only four young reared; (2) pair fledged two young; (3) pair fledged one young. YORKSHIRE Two localities: (1) pair bred and raised one young, second pair probably bred; (2) pair present in May, did not breed.

Scotland, S

One locality: six pairs. BORDERS One locality: six pairs bred, but only four young fledged from four broods.

Scotland, Mid

Five localities: 4-7 pairs. ANGUS One locality: pair made two nesting attempts, both failed. FIFE One locality: three pairs bred, but all nests were flooded. PERTHSHIRE Three localities: (1)-(3) pairs present in suitable habitat, but no successful breeding reported.

Black-necked Grebe	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
No. localities	31	32	30	32	26	18	22	29	32	26
Confirmed pairs	24	27	30	20	17	35	34	48	42	50
Max. total pairs	50	81	77	53	46	48	53	65	70	65

Leach's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*

Although this species is on the Panel's list, by virtue of being on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act, there has not previously been anything meaningful to report. However, as part of Seabird 2000, the recent census of breeding seabirds in Britain & Ireland, the first-ever national count of Leach's Storm-petrels was carried out between 1999 and 2002, aided by the use of taped call playback. The results are reported in full in Mitchell *et al.* (2004) and summarised briefly here.

The census found 48,047 adults on nests (95% confidence limits: 36,432-64,883), all in Scotland, plus a further 310 adults on nests in Ireland (Stags of Broadhaven, Co. Mayo). The great majority of the Scottish breeding birds (45,433, 94% of the British and Irish population), were on the four main islands in the St Kilda group. Elsewhere, there were 1,425 spread between six islands in the Flannan Isles; 1,132 on North Rona, with five on neighbouring Sula Sgeir; 20 on Gruney and 15 on Foula, Shetland; and 17 on Old Hill Island, Loch Roag, Lewis.

Since there is no previous census with which to compare these results, it is not possible to say whether there have been any significant changes in numbers of breeding Leach's Storm-petrels in the UK. Nevertheless, Mitchell *et al.* (2004) note that there appears to have been no major shift in distribution, at least in the last 70 years.

Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*

23 breeding localities, which held a minimum of 31 and a maximum of 37 booming males, with 26-30 known nesting attempts.

England, SW

One locality: single booming male for a short period.

England, SE

Two localities: (1)(2) single booming males.

England, E

17 localities: *Suffolk coast*: (1) Minsmere: Seven booming males, eight nesting attempts; (2) Walberswick: 4-5 booming males, probably three nesting attempts; (3) Easton Broad: 1-2 booming males, 3-4 nesting attempts; (4) North Warren: one booming male, two nesting attempts; (5) Hen: one booming male, one nesting attempt; (6) Benacre: single booming male for short period.

Norfolk Broads: (7) one booming male, two nesting attempts; (8) one booming male, 1-2 nesting attempts; (9) 1-2 booming males, one nesting attempt; (10)(11) one booming male, one unconfirmed nesting attempt; (12) two booming males; (13)-(15) single booming males.

North Norfolk coast: no records of booming or nesting birds in 2002.

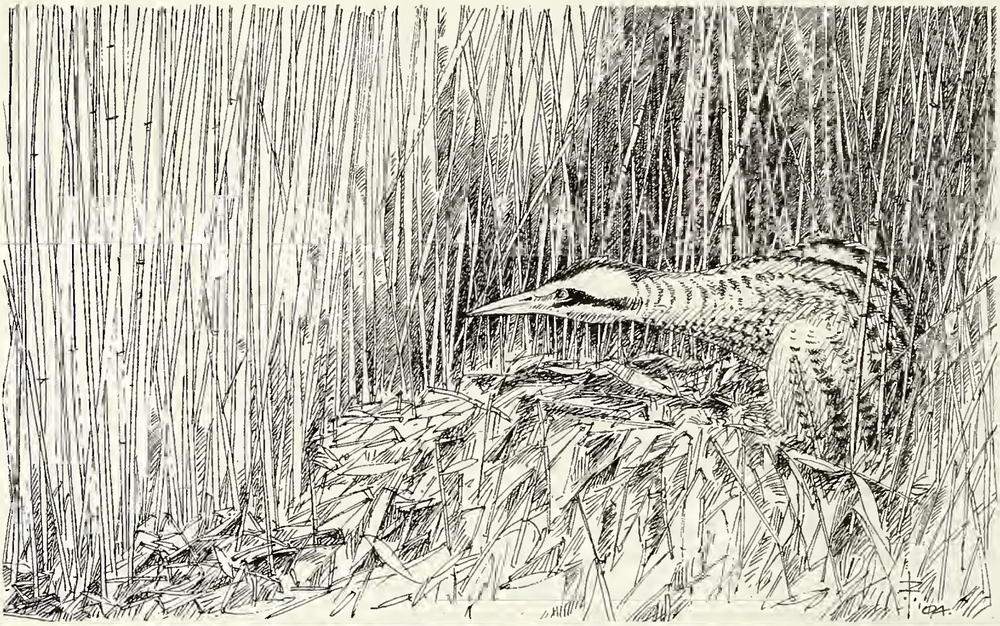
Elsewhere: (16) single booming male; (17) single booming male for short periods.

England, N

Four localities: *Lancashire*: (1) Leighton Moss: two booming males, two nesting attempts.

Humberside: (2) one booming male, 2-3 nesting attempts; (3) one booming male, one unconfirmed nesting attempt; (4) no booming heard, but pair bred.

Eurasian Bittern	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
No. booming localities	11	10	11	10	8	11	15	16	18	23
Confirmed nests	5	5	11	8	15	13	22	19	26	26
Booming males (min.)	15	15	19	22	11	13	19	23	30	31
Booming males (max.)	17	16	20	22	12	17	23	28	32	37



Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*

Ken Smith and Gillian Gilbert, RSPB, have commented as follows: '2002 marks the fifth consecutive year in which Eurasian Bittern numbers have increased, from a low point of 11 confirmed males in 1997 to 31 in 2002. The number of breeding localities has also increased, to 23 in 2002. There has been a concerted conservation programme for this species and its habitat in the last decade, led by the RSPB and English Nature and involving many organisations including the Broads Authority, the National Trust, the Wildlife Trusts and many others. Major funding has been provided through the EU Life Programme, and the Cooperative Bank has sponsored the programme throughout.

'The key problem facing Eurasian Bitterns was identified as the drying out of their reedbed habitat, largely as a consequence of natural succession. Habitat management work has been carried out at many existing reedbed sites to restore wet conditions over part of each site. The response of the birds has been spectacular with, for example, numbers at Minsmere increasing from one booming bird in

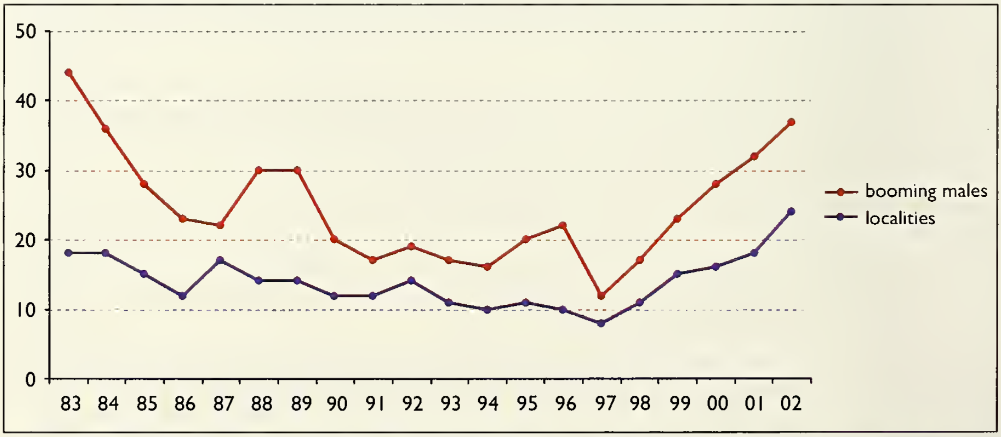


Fig. 1. The British population of Eurasian Bitterns *Botaurus stellaris* has responded well to habitat management in the 1990s. The number of booming males, and the number of sites where those males have been present, have both increased steadily since 1997. Although it is often difficult to establish the precise number of confirmed nesting attempts without causing undue disturbance, these have also shown a corresponding increase (see table).

1991 to seven in 2002, and many formerly abandoned sites being recolonised. In addition to work at existing sites, there has been a programme of new reedbed creation. Although this has taken longer to bear fruit, the first signs that newly created reedbeds were being occupied by breeding Eurasian Bitterns were apparent in 2001 and 2002 – a good portent for the future.

'There are many examples of the success of the habitat restoration work. For instance, on Humberside, the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust carried out an extensive programme of reedbed restoration and was rewarded with the first booming Eurasian Bittern recolonising one of their sites in 2000. In 2002, there were three occupied sites in the area, signalling a new core population in the making. The Norfolk Broads have always been the stronghold for breeding Eurasian Bitterns in the UK but, during the early 1990s, there were only two or three regularly occupied sites there. Thanks to work by the Broads Authority, RSPB, English Nature, the Norfolk Wildlife Trust and many individual owners, the tide now appears to have been turned. In 2002, there were 10 or 11 booming birds at a total of nine sites.

'On a less positive note, 2002 was the first year for many decades with no booming records whatsoever from the north Norfolk coast. Problems of tidal inundation and limited habitat quality have resulted in poor productivity in north Norfolk over the last few years. It is hoped that colonising birds from elsewhere will help to maintain the species in this region until the habitat problems can be resolved.'

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

22 localities: 146-162 pairs bred. A further increase in numbers of breeding pairs, though observers at several localities commented on the difficulty of ascertaining exactly how many pairs were actually breeding and what their success was. The breeding which took place in Cheshire & Wirral in 2001 was not repeated, but successful breeding occurred for the first time in north Wales, and the first breeding records for Devon, Norfolk and Suffolk were reported.

England, SW

Eight localities: 69-71 pairs. DEVON. One locality: pair bred; first for county. DORSET Two localities: (1) 42 pairs bred, fledging success unknown; (2) three or four pairs bred. HAMPSHIRE Two localities: (1) 15 pairs bred; (2) at least four pairs bred. SOMERSET Two localities: (1) two pairs bred, rearing four young; (2) two pairs bred, rearing three young. WILTSHIRE One locality: pair present, breeding not proved but strongly suspected.

England, SE

Four localities: 65-73 pairs. ESSEX One locality: 32 pairs reared 46 young. KENT Two localities: (1) 15-20 pairs bred, no details of success; (2) 18 pairs bred, no details of success. SUSSEX One locality: three pairs thought to have bred, up to 15 adults seen.

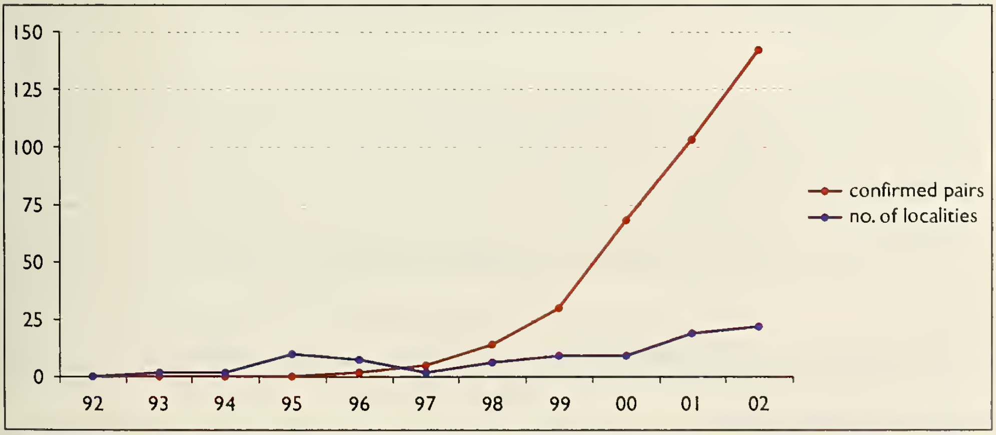


Fig. 2. The spread of Little Egrets *Egretta garzetta* along the south and east coasts of England continues unabated, with the first breeding records for Devon, Suffolk and Norfolk in 2002, and further consolidation within the core range. Expansion along the west coast and into Wales appears to be much slower, although successful breeding was reported from Anglesey in 2002.

England, E

Seven localities: 10-14 pairs. CAMBRIDGESHIRE Two localities: (1) pair displaying in May, apparently recently fledged juvenile in mid July, presumed reared nearby as did not breed on site; (2) three birds in suitable habitat until early May. NORFOLK Two localities: (1) five pairs fledged 13 young; (2) three pairs fledged at least six young; first breeding records for the county. SUFFOLK Three localities: (1) two pairs bred, rearing at least two young; (2) pair built nest, but unsuccessful; (3) pair present in suitable habitat, but not clear whether breeding was attempted; first breeding records for the county.

England, N

One locality: 0-1 pairs. LANCASHIRE & NORTH MERSEYSIDE One locality: female laid at least one egg, no male seen.

Wales

Two localities: 2-3 pairs. ANGLESEY One locality: pair bred and fledged four young, second pair possibly bred and fledged one young; first for county. SOUTH WALES One locality: at least one pair bred.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Much nest-building took place at one locality in Suffolk, although nesting attempts did not reach the egg-laying stage. Birds from this site regularly visited several other sites along the Suffolk coast which are also thought to be suitable for breeding, but their visits were usually brief. Colonisation can still be forecast with some confidence, though the birds are taking their time. The numbers breeding in The Netherlands continue to fluctuate, with 1,314 pairs breeding in 2003, down from 1,586 pairs in 2002 (*Dutch Birding* 26: 193-207).

England, E

NORFOLK Birds were reported from at least seven localities during May-July, with 1-5 individuals at most sites, but with 11 at one locality and up to 15 at another (though some duplication involved); no breeding activity was reported. SUFFOLK One locality: up to 19 were present from mid May to late August and built no fewer than ten nests, though it is unclear whether any eggs were laid; no young were seen.

England, N

One locality: four adults in July and August in suitable breeding habitat.

Honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus*

Confirmed breeding by 20 pairs; minimum of 22 young reared. The number of confirmed pairs and probable/possible nesting attempts are well down on those reported in 2001, when FMD access restrictions may have resulted in some pairs being overlooked. The 33% drop in the number of confirmed pairs since 2000 is a cause for concern, and this situation requires careful monitoring. If the decline is real, and not a reflection of under-reporting, its causes are far from clear.

Great Britain

Nine pairs fledged two young, four pairs fledged one young, and seven pairs bred and failed. 14 pairs probably or possibly bred. In addition, four single birds were reported from known breeding localities.

The breakdown of the above into countries is: England 16 pairs bred, plus 14 probable/possible pairs); Wales no information received; and Scotland four pairs bred.

Honey-buzzard	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Confirmed pairs	6	9	9	14	14	17	13	33	27	20
Max. total pairs	27	28	30	34	39	37	43	69	54	34

Red Kite *Milvus milvus*

Wales

A total of 292 territories was checked, of which c. 250 were thought to be occupied. A minimum of 217 nests were active and eggs were laid in not less than 205. Of these, at least 128 pairs fledged a total of 179 young. 64 pairs which laid eggs definitely failed, with an uncertain outcome at 13 others. There was some correlation between nest failure rates and the higher than average rainfall which occurred in the south and southwest of the range. The first

Red Kite – Wales	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Total pairs	115	138	146	161	180	200	228	249	(285)	250
Breeding pairs	104	111	127	130	152	167	181	201	(223)	217
Successful pairs	61	70	79	90	99	112	118	103	(168)	128
Young reared	82	99	117	119	129	174	165	141	(247)	179
Young/territorial pair	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.7	0.7	0.9	0.7	0.6	(0.9)	0.7

Note: 2001 data are estimates only for this and the other Red Kite tables. In Wales, these are estimates for the *total* population, whereas the absolute figures in other years show the number of pairs actually located and *not* an estimate of the total population. Visit the website of the Welsh Kite Trust (www.welshkitetrust.org) for further details.

confirmed breeding took place in Pembrokeshire with two pairs each rearing two young. The predicted eastward expansion into England did not materialise in 2002; indeed, three new sites in East Radnor were unoccupied this year.

England, South

A total of 139 breeding pairs was located in the Chilterns and the number of young known to have been reared was 219, the first time since releases began that the number of fledged young was less than for the previous year (2001 revised figures of 246 chicks from 132 pairs). Wet weather, combined with the high density of nests in the core area, is thought to have been responsible for the reduced productivity. 18 nests failed and 24 other pairs either did not return to their nests of 2001 or were not located. In addition, three pairs bred in Wiltshire, two of them rearing a total of four young, the third failing at the egg stage.

England, Central

In the East Midlands release area, numbers increased to 23 breeding pairs (compared with 13 in 2001), of which 19 were successful, rearing 43 young. The population continues to expand its range, with several nests found in new areas more than 10 km away from the core part of the range.

England, North

Ten pairs bred, two more than in 2001; nine pairs reared a total of 20 young while the other failed through causes unknown. After the hiatus in 2001, when FMD restrictions prevented the planned release of further birds, 18 young birds were taken from nests in the Chilterns and released in the area.

Red Kite – England	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Total pairs	12	22	26	na	61	87	na	146	(159)	na
Breeding pairs	9	20	24	37+	57	76	83	131+	(155)	175
Successful pairs	8	17	22	na	50	67	78	na	na	na
Young reared	14	37	55	80	111	146	172	226+	(288+)	286
Young/territorial pair	1.2	1.7	2.1	–	1.8	1.7	–	1.5	(1.8)	1.6*

* There was no count of territorial pairs; the figure given is young reared per breeding pair.

Scotland, South

A further 24 birds were released in summer 2002, of which 20 were from the Black Isle and four from the Chilterns, bringing the total to 57 released in two years. The birds released in 2001 did well, with two pairs being formed. Birds from both pairs were seen carrying sticks and attempting copulation. One pair built a nest but did not lay.

Scotland, Central

15 of 18 known pairs laid eggs, five more than in 2001. Four of these failed during extremely wet weather in May, but the other 11 reared 24-25 young. Included in these totals is a pair which bred successfully in Perthshire, rearing two young; this pair, which failed in 2001, represents the first successful breeding in the county in modern times.

Scotland, North

A total of 38 pairs was located, four more than in 2001, and the rate of increase of this population continues to be slow. Of these, 35 pairs laid eggs and 32 successfully reared 87 young (ten more than in 2001). Although breeding productivity was good, recruitment of second-year birds into this population continues to give cause for concern. For the first time since 1995, no confirmed cases of poisoning were reported although there were three road deaths, and two of these birds had high levels of rodenticides and lead in their blood.

Red Kite – Scotland	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Total pairs	8	11	17	22	27	30	39	44	(44)	58
Breeding pairs	5	8	15	17	23	25	36	40	(44)	50
Successful pairs	3	6	11	16	19	22	26	38	(38)	43
Young reared	7	13	26	39	39	47	59	84	(84)	111
Young/territorial pair	0.9	1.2	1.5	1.8	1.4	1.6	1.5	1.9	(1.9)	1.9

Ian Carter, English Nature, has commented as follows: 'Red Kite populations in England continue to thrive. Levels of breeding productivity are high, and with the majority of birds breeding for the first time when only two years old, there is plenty of scope for further rapid increase during the coming years. In the main, breeding populations are still concentrated in areas close to the release sites. In the Chilterns, for example, over 58 pairs have been found breeding in the 10-km square containing the release site (see Wotton *et al.* 2002). There has also been some welcome range expansion, however, with at least three pairs in Wiltshire, which hopefully signals the beginning of a more rapid colonisation of areas away from the Chilterns.

'Unfortunately, some birds in England are still lost to deliberate illegal persecution and to accidental death when scavenging on rats killed by highly toxic modern poisons. English Nature and RSPB continue to encourage landowners and pest control companies to consider alternatives to the most toxic rat poisons, and to follow guidelines on safe practice when the use of poisons is unavoidable. An advisory leaflet 'Rat poison and the threat to birds of prey' has been produced and is available from English Nature's Enquiry Service (tel. 01733 455101; e-mail: enquiries@english-nature.org.uk).

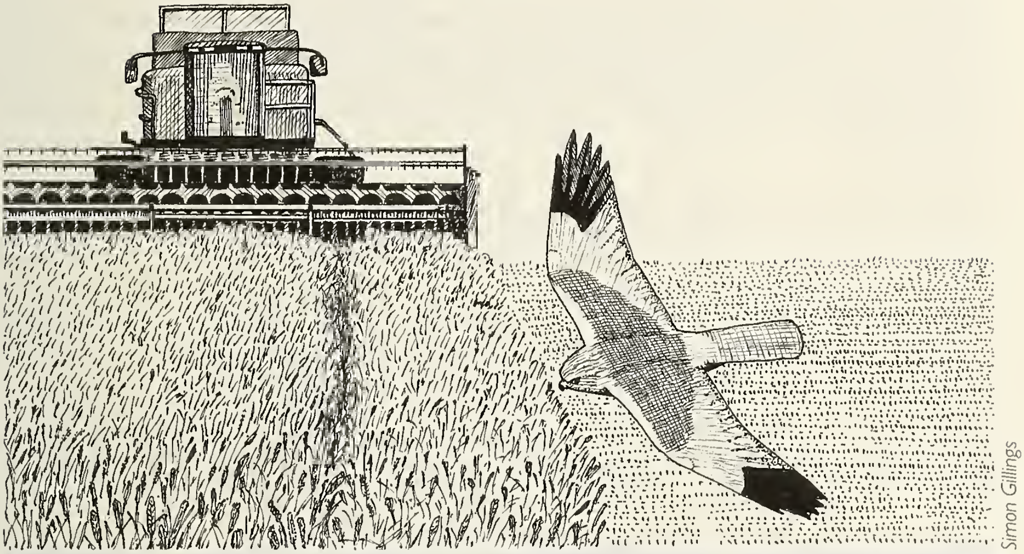
'In Wales, breeding productivity remains low, constrained by the cool, damp spring weather and poor food supply compared with lowland areas farther east. On average, breeding pairs rear only about half the number of young as in England. Despite this, the population has maintained a steady increase over recent years and it can only be a matter of time before birds are found breeding over the border in western England.

'The lack of increase in the northern Scotland (Black Isle) breeding population remains a serious cause for concern. It is worth noting that similar numbers of young Red Kites were released on the Black Isle as in the Chilterns, over approximately the same period. The Chilterns population reached a minimum of 175 breeding pairs in 2002, whereas the Black Isle population of 35 pairs was only 20% of this level, having increased little during the last few years. Breeding productivity is similar in the two areas and the stark difference in fortunes appears to stem mainly from far higher levels of illegal poisoning in northern Scotland, particularly on areas of moorland managed for Red Grouse shooting. The link between grouse moors and the illegal use of poisons in Scotland was highlighted recently (Whitfield *et al.* 2003).'

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*

The number of occupied home ranges in Scotland continues to increase, this year by three to 26, with a further range occupied by a single bird. Although 22 pairs, including three new pairs, laid eggs, only 14 were known to hatch eggs and just eight successful pairs reared a minimum of 12 young. The numbers of successful pairs, and of young reared, are both increasing much more slowly than overall numbers, and this was the second consecutive season with low productivity. With the exception of one nest where a breeding male was deliberately poisoned (both young were fostered on to other nests), the failures were all thought to be natural, with no instances of nest robbery this year.

White-tailed Eagle	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Breeding pairs/trios (min)	6	8	9	12	11	18	18	20-21	23	26
Clutches laid	6	8	9	12	11-13	16-17	15-16	18-20	17	22
Successful pairs	4	4	5	7	5	9	6	8	10	8
Young reared	5	5	7	9	9	13	11	12	11	12
Young/breeding pair	0.8	0.6	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.5



Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

222-246 females and 218-238 males bred, rearing at least 503 young. The great majority of the population still breeds within Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Suffolk, but the spread both south and north from here continues, with increasing numbers in southeast and northern England. Although the successful breeding in Orkney in 2001 was not repeated, pairs reared young in four different areas of Scotland.

England, SW

Three localities: 2-3 females and two males bred, plus three immatures. ISLE OF WIGHT One locality: long-staying female in suitable habitat. SOMERSET One locality: up to three immatures in suitable habitat. WILTSHIRE One locality: two pairs reared six young.

England, SE

13 localities or areas: 37-42 females and 36-40 males bred, plus nine non-breeders. ESSEX Six localities: (1) two males and three females bred, rearing six young; (2) pair reared three young; (3) pair bred successfully; (4)-(6) single summering pairs. KENT Seven localities or areas: (1) 24 nests produced minimum 32 young; (2) five pairs bred, 11 young reared from three successful nests; (3) pair reared one young, second female possibly bred; (4) pair reared three young, second pair present; (5) pair bred; (6) up to six adults, breeding not proved; (7) up to three birds in June.

England, E

166-181 females and 166-180 males bred. CAMBRIDGESHIRE Seven localities: (1) six pairs reared minimum seven young; (2) three pairs reared 10+ young; (3) two pairs reared three young; (4)(5) pair reared three young, second pair possibly bred; (6) two pairs possibly bred; (7) female built nest but abandoned site. HUNTINGDON & PETERBOROUGH Three localities: (1)-(3) single pairs bred, two successfully, rearing seven young. LINCOLNSHIRE Whole county: 42 pairs reared at least 159 young, one pair probably bred, seven pairs possibly bred. NORFOLK Whole county: 70 pairs reared minimum 115 young, two pairs possibly bred. SUFFOLK Whole county: 38 pairs reared at least 87 young.

England, N

Seven localities: 9-11 females and 6-8 males bred. LANCASHIRE & NORTH MERSEYSIDE Two localities: (1) one male and three females bred and fledged seven young; (2) pair summered. YORKSHIRE Five localities: (1) two pairs fledged five young; (2) male and two females fledged four young; (3) pair fledged three young; (4) pair bred, success unknown; (5) pair present.

Scotland, Mid

Four localities: eight females and eight males bred. ANGUS & DUNDEE One locality: pair fledged four young. FIFE One locality: pair fledged four young. NORTHEAST SCOTLAND One locality: two pairs bred, fledging eight young. PERTH & KINROSS One locality: four pairs bred, fledging 15 young.

Scotland, N
One locality: 0-1 females bred. ORKNEY One locality: female carrying nest material, but no male present.

Marsh Harrier	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Breeding males	84	114	151	135	131	137	145	184	260	238
Breeding females	110	129	156	136	132	138	145	206	272	246
Young reared	244	255	277	263	206	292	256	377	482	503

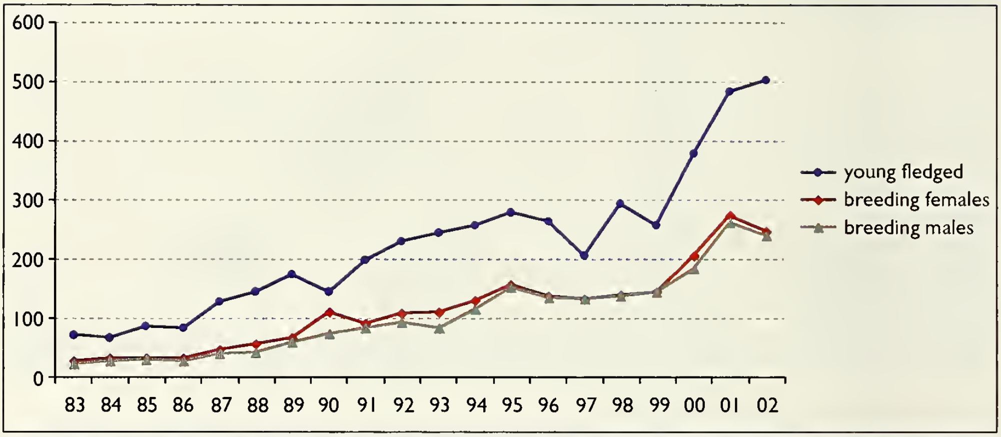


Fig. 3. Marsh Harriers *Circus aeruginosus* are thriving in eastern England, with 150 pairs in the three counties of Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Suffolk. Expansion into adjacent coastal and inland counties continues, but appears to have stalled along the south coast. Away from the core part of the British range, it is encouraging to see eight pairs breeding in Scotland and 11-13 pairs in northern England.

Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*

The following summary data were received, based on a non-randomised sample rather than a complete survey. Although the number of occupied territories showed a significant increase over that reported in 2001, breeding success was poor in many areas. The total number of territorial pairs found during the 1998 census was 570 (range 499-640) (Sim *et al.* 2001).

Hen Harrier	Occupied territories	Territories known to have fledged young	Min. no. young fledged	Min. young/ occupied territory
England, N	10	6	18	1.80
Wales	4	4	?	–
Borders & Lothian	11	3	7+	0.64
Dumfries & Galloway	16	11	21	1.31
South Strathclyde	23	5	13	0.57
Central	12	3	9	0.75
Tayside	25	9	26	1.04
Northeast Scotland	18	12	44	2.44
Argyll & Bute	43	15	36	0.84
Highland & West Moray	36	20	57	1.58
Orkney	47	20	48	1.02
Western Isles	28	14	27	0.96
Northern Ireland	No reports received			
TOTALS	273	122	306	1.12

Note: The Scottish regions in the above table follow the 2002 Raptor Round Up (published by the Scottish Ornithologists' Club, on behalf of the Scottish Raptor Study Groups, as a supplement to *Scottish Birds* Vol. 24), which merged Highland with Moray & Nairn and also merged Perth & Kinross with Angus to form Tayside.

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*

Eight localities: 7-11 pairs reared 12 young. A particularly poor year, made all the worse by the relatively high numbers breeding in 2001 when FMD access restrictions may have resulted in some birds being overlooked. The number of localities containing breeding Montagu's Harriers was the lowest for ten years, the count of breeding pairs was the lowest since 1998, and the number of fledged young fell by 40% compared with 2001.

England, SW

Three localities: (1) pair reared one young; (2) pair bred but failed; (3) pair present.

England, SE

One locality: (1) pair bred, result unknown.

England, E

Three localities: (1) three pairs bred, rearing seven young, additional two males and one female present; (2) pair fledged four young; (3) single male briefly on territory in May, no female seen.

England, Central

One locality: (1) pair present in April, started to build nest platform and food pass seen, then only single bird until mid July.

Montagu's Harrier	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
No. localities	8	15	14	16	13	11	11	18	11	8
Breeding males	5	7	8	6	7	3	4	8	9	7
Other males	2	9	8	8	6	10	4	8	4	5
Breeding females	6	12	9	7	9	3	4	9	11	7
Other females	1	11	4	7	3	5	5	5	1	3
Young	9	13	26	14	11	8	12	7-8	20	12

Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*

At least 287 localities or areas: 217-297 pairs breeding. Numbers of Northern Goshawks breeding in the UK appear to fluctuate without any clear pattern, but this may, in part, be a result of the difficulty in locating active nests and monitoring their success. Although the number of pairs reported increased considerably over 2001, totals did not quite bounce back to the level seen in 2000. We would urge observers to report breeding pairs even if, understandably, they prefer not to reveal precise locations. In addition, territorial Northern Goshawks are most conspicuous in late winter when displaying over their breeding range. Their presence at this time is indicative of possible breeding later in the year, and the Panel would welcome all reports of displaying birds to establish whether numbers are fluctuating as markedly as the statistics suggest.

England

At least 173 localities in 22 counties: 144 pairs known to have bred, plus 39 other pairs.

Wales

42 localities in ten counties: 25 pairs known to have bred, plus 17 other pairs.

Scotland

72 localities in six recording areas: 48 pairs known to have bred, plus 24 other pairs.

Northern Goshawk	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
No. counties	35	33	38	33	41	38	42	36	33	38
Confirmed pairs	199	145	249	160	247	179	198	237	157	217
Max. total pairs	299	225	319	213	347	249	293	322	255	297

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*

The following summary data were received, based on a non-randomised sample rather than a complete survey. The first complete census since 1992 took place in 2003, and preliminary results suggest little change in the overall total in the intervening period.

Golden Eagle	Occupied territories	Territories known to have fledged young	Min. no. young fledged	Min. young/ territorial pair
England, N	1	0	0	–
Dumfries & Galloway	2	1	1	0.50
Borders	2	1	1	0.50
Central Scotland	7	2	3	0.43
Tayside	11	6	10	0.91
Northeast Scotland	19	na	11	0.58
Argyll	57	15	15	0.26
Highland	na	24	31	na
Western Isles	14	6	7	0.5

No totals are given as the data available are too incomplete.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

163 pairs with territories: 138 pairs laid eggs, rearing 215 young. The number of young reared has fallen for the first time in recent years, if only slightly; this is probably related to the difficulty in finding all the pairs now breeding in Scotland. The increase in southern Scotland is particularly exciting, from just one pair in 2001 to five in 2002, while three pairs again bred in Cumbria. It is also encouraging to see the number of egg-laying pairs in Forth increasing from eight to 11 pairs, although fledging success here was poor compared with 2001. The pair which bred at Rutland Water in 2001 did so again, albeit unsuccessfully. Breeding success in Scotland was patchy, being quite good in Highland, but much less so in Tayside and Argyll.

England, Central

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE Pair present from April to June, seen calling and displaying over artificial platform in April but did not breed. RUTLAND Rutland Water: One pair bred, one young died shortly after hatching following several days of heavy rain; no further birds released since this phase of the re-establishment programme is now complete.

England, N

CUMBRIA Three localities: (1) pair bred, one young reared; (2) pair bred, but failed after hatch; (3) pair attempted to breed, but one adult found dead (persecution).

Scotland, S

BORDERS Four pairs bred, two reared four young. DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY One pair bred, rearing one young; first breeding in region for over 100 years.

Scotland, Mid

FORTH 13 occupied territories, 11 pairs laid eggs, of which six reared 11 young. NORTHEAST SCOTLAND 16 pairs occupied territories, 14 pairs laid, 13 of which reared 28 young. TAYSIDE 44 occupied territories, 36 clutches laid, 27 pairs reared 50 young.

Scotland, N & W

ARGYLL Five pairs bred of which three fledged six young. HIGHLAND 75 pairs located of which 64 bred and 50 reared 114 young.

Osprey	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Occupied territories	88	95	99	104	111	131	136	151	158	163
Pairs with eggs	78	83	92	93	102	117	125	125	139	138
Successful pairs	56	69	73	74	77	93	87	na	107	101
Young reared	111	146	146	155	159	194	183	209	224	215
Young/occupied territory	1.3	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.4	1.5	1.3	1.4	1.4	1.3

Merlin *Falco columbarius*

The following summary data were received, based on a non-randomised sample rather than a complete census. The number of territories monitored has partly recovered from the low numbers in 2001, though not back to the levels of some of the preceding years. Productivity, however, was the best since 1997. The most recent estimate of the British population is 1,300 (1,100-1,500) pairs in 1993-94 (Rebecca & Bainbridge 1998). In addition to those shown in the table below, one or two pairs possibly bred in southwest England.

Merlin	Occupied territories	Territories known to have fledged young	Min. no. young fledged	Min. young/ occupied territory
England, Central	11	8	33	3.00
England, N	173	102	344	1.99
Wales	22	16	49	2.23
Borders & Lothian	22	15	48+	2.18
Dumfries & Galloway	8	0	0	–
Tayside	40	27	70+	1.75
Northeast Scotland	43	31	112	2.60
Argyll & Bute	4	0	0	–
Highland	33	19	64	1.94
Orkney	21	12	41	1.95
Shetland	9	6	14+	1.56
Western Isles	11	?	26	2.36
Northern Ireland	No reports received			
TOTALS	397	236	801	2.02

Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

Minimum of 277-590 pairs breeding. These figures are considerably lower than comparable reports for 2001 (370-697 pairs) and 2000 (381-711 pairs). This species creates particular problems for County Recorders who, in the main, receive few confirmed breeding reports, and are faced with calculating the breeding population in their area from the sometimes considerable numbers of sightings over the summer period. More than one has urged their observers to spend a little longer trying to see whether birds are actually breeding. This total remains well below the recent estimate of 2,200 pairs for the total British breeding population (Clements 2001). In the far north of the species' British range, at least one pair bred in Highland for the second year running.

England, SW

46-149 pairs. AVON 4-9. DEVON 19-22. DORSET 2-14. GLOUCESTERSHIRE 1. HAMPSHIRE 6-53. ISLE OF WIGHT 1. SOMERSET 2-6. WILTSHIRE 11-43.

England, SE

143-228 pairs. BEDFORDSHIRE 1-2. ESSEX 13-23. KENT 120. OXFORDSHIRE 5. SURREY 4-28. SUSSEX 0-50.

England, E

23-65 pairs. HUNTINGDON & PETERBOROUGH 9-17. LINCOLNSHIRE 1. NORFOLK 7-11. NORTHAMPTONSHIRE 3-5. SUFFOLK 3-31.

England, Central

55-109 pairs. DERBYSHIRE 23-27. LEICESTERSHIRE 1-9. NOTTINGHAMSHIRE 7. SHROPSHIRE 2-21. STAFFORDSHIRE 5-10. WARWICKSHIRE 17-35.

England, N

9-31 pairs. CHESHIRE & WIRRAL 3-9. LANCASHIRE & NORTH MERSEYSIDE 0-3. NORTHUMBERLAND 6-8. YORKSHIRE 0-11.

Wales

0-6 pairs. BRECON 0-5. MEIRIONNYDD 0-1.

Scotland, N

1-2 pairs. HIGHLAND 1-2.

Hobby	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Confirmed pairs	152	170	161	190	167	161	246	381	470	277
Max. total pairs	493	500	430	454	624	675	553	711	697	590

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

A national census of the Peregrine was carried out in 2002, the full results of which will be published in *Bird Study*. Here, the summary totals for each region are presented as a comparison between the 2002 census and the 1991 census; data from BTO, RSPB and SNH. There may be some minor amendments to the totals when finally published.

Since 1991, the number of Peregrines breeding in the UK has increased from 1,316 to 1,492 occupied territories: an overall increase of 13.4%. This, however, masks the fact that there have been significant declines in parts of Scotland, especially in Highland and Argyll, while the species is now extinct as a breeding bird in Shetland. Set against these declines, there has been a continued general expansion of both range and numbers, especially in southern and central England. The south coast of England has been recolonised and Peregrines now breed in inland counties where they have not previously been recorded. There were also increases in south Wales, parts of northern England and southern Scotland, some of which have coincided with the use of new sites, particularly quarries and tall buildings.

Region	Occupied territories 1991	Occupied territories 2002	difference	Region	Occupied territories 1991	Occupied territories 2002	difference
SE England: coastal	6	25	317%	Western Isles	12	20	67%
SE England: inland	0	14	–	Highlands: coastal	54	41	-24%
SW England: coastal	96	128	33%	Highlands: inland	120	79	-34%
SW England: inland	19	71	274%	NE Scotland: coastal	12	17	42%
South Wales: coastal	52	67	29%	NE Scotland: inland	51	42	-18%
South Wales: inland	78	105	35%	Tayside: coastal	2	4	100%
North Wales: coastal	23	23	0%	Tayside: inland	94	94	0%
North Wales: inland	110	93	-15%	Central	40	37	-8%
W Midlands & Lancs lowlands	15	49	227%	Argyll: coastal	63	43	-32%
NW England: coastal	20	29	45%	Argyll: inland	40	30	-25%
NW England: inland	81	77	-5%	S Strathclyde: coastal	7	13	86%
Pennines	51	84	65%	S Strathclyde: inland	17	21	24%
Cheviots	13	23	77%	Dumfries & Galloway: coastal	23	26	13%
NE England: coastal	3	6	100%	Dumfries & Galloway: inland	51	52	2%
NE England: inland	1	4	300%	Lothian & Borders: coastal	5	10	100%
Central East England	0	9	–	Lothian & Borders: inland	31	37	19%
Shetland	5	0	-100%	Northern Ireland: coastal	26	23	-12%
Orkney	22	26	18%	Northern Ireland: inland	73	70	-4%
				TOTALS	1,316	1,492	13.4%

Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana*

11 localities: 18 singing males. A particularly poor year, with fewer than usual, or even none at all, reported from several regular haunts, especially in Scotland. The national census carried out in 1999 (Gilbert 2002) remains the most accurate recent estimate of the total British population.

England, SW

One locality: two males. SOMERSET One locality: 1-2 singing males.

England, E

Seven localities: 11 males. CAMBRIDGESHIRE One locality: three singing males. NORFOLK Four localities: (1) three singing males including, on one occasion, a pair singing; (2)-(4) single singing males. SUFFOLK Two localities: (1)(2) single singing males.

Scotland, N & W

Three localities: five males. HIGHLAND One locality: two singing males. ORKNEY One locality: one singing male. SHETLAND One locality: two singing males.

Spotted Crake	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
No. localities	19	5	8	8	13	16	40	22	23	11
No. pairs/singing males	31	11	10	13	14	31	46-77	34	35	18

Corn Crake *Crex crex*

676 singing males. The total of 660 singing males in the 'core area' of the Hebrides and Orkney is an increase of 61 over 2001, which is the largest increase since 1995. There were increases on all the Inner Hebridean islands with the exception of Eigg, where the one bird in 2001 did not reappear. The increase on Coll and Tiree (from 205 to 246) was especially noteworthy, while the first Corn Crakes since 1998 were reported on Canna. In the Western Isles, numbers increased on two islands and declined on four, although the overall total was down by only four. Numbers on the mainland of Scotland declined for the second year running. No data were available for Northern Ireland.

England, SW

One locality: one singing male. DEVON One locality: one singing male.

England, E

One locality: one singing male. NORFOLK One locality: one singing male.

England, N

One locality: one singing male. YORKSHIRE One locality: one singing male.

Scotland, Mid

Two localities: one singing male, one dead adult. AYR Two localities: (1) singing male for ten days in May; (2) adult killed by combine in July.

Scotland, N & W: Mainland

Two main areas: ten singing males. CAITHNESS One singing male. SUTHERLAND Up to nine singing males.

Scotland, N & W: Hebrides and Orkney, the 'core area'

17 localities or areas: 660 singing males. Total number of singing males: ARGYLL – INNER HEBRIDES 292 (Coll 74, Tiree 172, Mull 1, Iona 12, Colonsay & Oronsay 25, Islay 8), HIGHLAND – INNER HEBRIDES 29 (Skye 23, Canna 2, Muck 4), ORKNEY 16, WESTERN ISLES 323 (Lewis 57, Harris 5, Berneray 1, North Uist 71, Benbecula 30, South Uist 98, Barra & Vatersay 61).

Scotland, N & W: Shetland

One locality: one singing male.

Corn Crake	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Singing males in 'core area' (see above)	446	463	537	583	637	543	571	591	597	660
Singing males, UK total	480	478	551	605	644	589	576	622	619	676

Common Crane *Grus grus*

The Norfolk birds bred successfully for the second year in a row, while the summering of two pairs in Yorkshire is a first indication of breeding elsewhere.

England, E
NORFOLK One locality: two pairs nested, one of which reared two young.
England, N
YORKSHIRE Two localities: (1) pair summered and displayed, but no nest built; (2) pair summered.

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

52 localities: 1,262-1,266 pairs. Information on breeding success was incomplete, but 142 young were known to have been reared. Both the number of colonies and the number of breeding pairs were new record totals. At many colonies, however, including several of the larger ones, breeding success was extremely poor or non-existent, thanks to the regular inhibitors of predation and bad weather. The continued rapid growth in numbers, despite the poor production of recent years, prompts speculation that the breeding population may not be wholly dependent on home-grown recruitment.

England, SW

One locality: two pairs. HAMPSHIRE One locality: two pairs bred, one reared two young, first breeding for the county.

England, SE

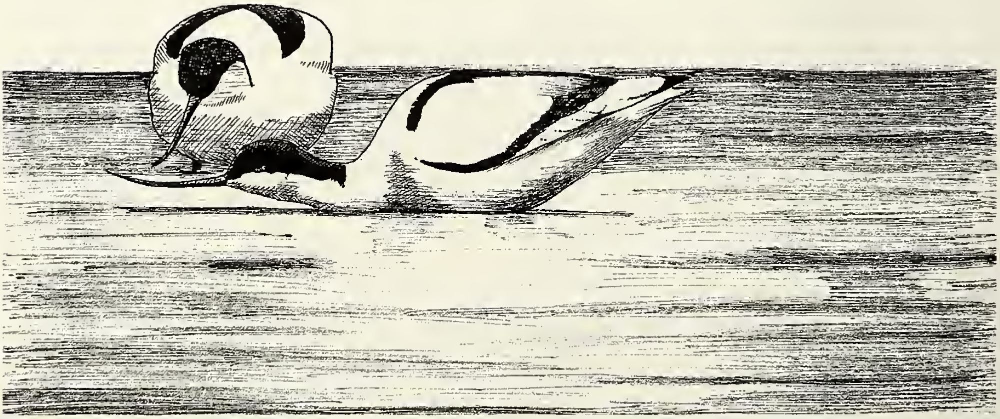
20 localities: 508 pairs. ESSEX Nine localities with breeding pairs, no information on numbers of young reared: (1) 49 pairs; (2) 28 pairs; (3) 25 pairs; (4) 21 pairs; (5) 20 pairs; (6) four pairs; (7) two pairs; (8)(9) single pairs. KENT 11 localities with breeding pairs, no information on numbers of young reared: (1) 99 pairs; (2) 70 pairs; (3) 60 pairs; (4) 45 pairs; (5) 37 pairs; (6) 18 pairs; (7) 15 pairs; (8) seven pairs; (9) three pairs; (10) two pairs; (11) one pair.

England, E

27 localities: 715-717 pairs. CAMBRIDGESHIRE Two localities: (1) four pairs bred; (2) pair bred, but failed. LINCOLNSHIRE Two localities: (1) 50 pairs bred; (2) 17 pairs bred. NORFOLK 14 localities with 381-383 pairs; at nine localities where breeding success recorded, 304 pairs reared 90 young. SUFFOLK Nine localities: (1) 105 pairs bred, no young fledged; (2) 54 pairs bred, no young fledged; (3) 31 pairs bred, no young fledged; (4) 23 pairs reared four young; (5) 15 pairs reared at least 11 young; (6) 23 pairs reared at least 14 young; (7) five pairs bred, no young fledged; (8) three pairs reared one young; (9) three pairs bred, success unknown.

England, N

Four localities: 37-39 pairs. CHESHIRE One locality: pair bred, rearing four young from second clutch; first breeding in county. LANCASHIRE & NORTH MERSEYSIDE Two localities: (1) 2-4 pairs reared 7-11 young; (2) two pairs reared seven young. YORKSHIRE One locality: 32 pairs reared two young.



Simon Gillings

Avocets *Recurvirostra avosetta*

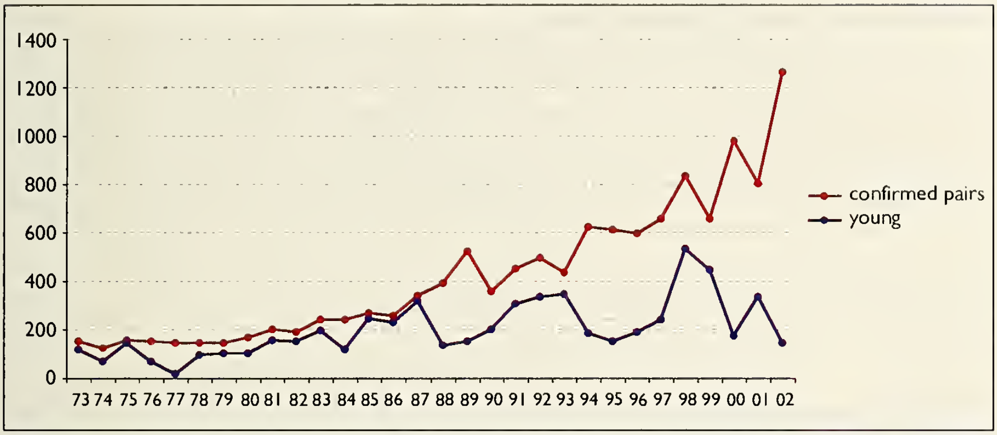


Fig. 4. In 2002, Avocets *Recurvirostra avosetta* reached a record total of 1,262-1,266 breeding pairs. While this may appear rosy, the gap between the number of breeding pairs and the number of young they produce continues to increase at an unsustainable and alarming pace. Recruitment into the UK population from elsewhere in Europe may be sustaining the population increase and data to support this would be welcome.

Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*

Six counties: 272-297 pairs fledged 140 young. Major problems of access in the Brecklands of Norfolk and Suffolk continued into 2002. As a result, these data are less complete and accurate than those obtained prior to 2001. The increase in breeding numbers in Wiltshire continues, but is not matched by those in Hampshire.

England, SW

100-125 pairs. DEVON One locality: pair present in breeding season. HAMPSHIRE 24 pairs fledged ten young, plus five pairs not proved to breed. WILTSHIRE 76 pairs fledged 37 young, plus 19 pairs not proved to breed.

England, SE

Six pairs. BERKSHIRE Six pairs bred, and reared two young.

England, E

166 pairs. NORFOLK 91 pairs reared at least 58 young. SUFFOLK 75 pairs reared 33 young.

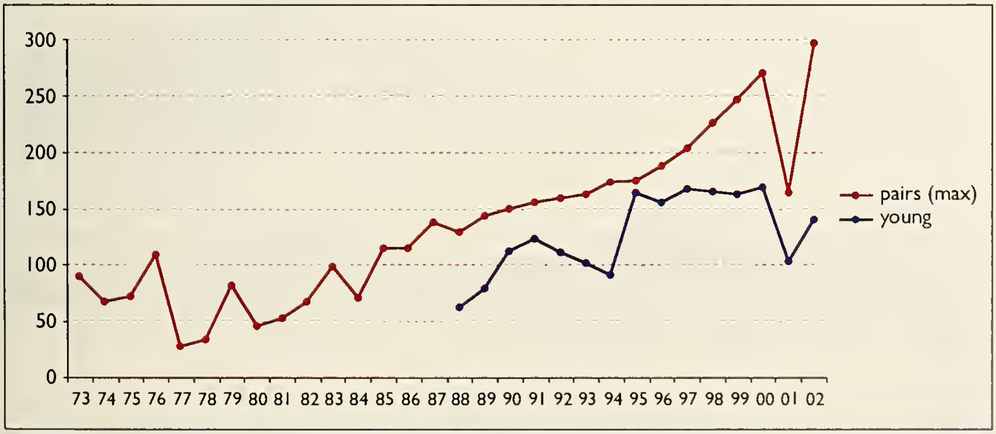


Fig. 5. Access restrictions to breeding sites in the Norfolk and Suffolk Brecks continues to thwart attempts to establish just how many Stône Curlews *Burhinus oedicnemus* are breeding there. Despite this, numbers are increasing steadily as this figure shows, particularly in Wiltshire, and in 2002 the estimated UK population comprised 272-297 pairs, which fledged 140 young.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

The following summary data are based on a non-randomised sample rather than a complete census. The total number of pairs reported continues to fall, comparative figures being 545 in both 2001 and 2000 and 636 in 1999. Comments from County Recorders suggest that this is a genuine decline rather than as a result of less thorough coverage, although this highly opportunistic species is extremely difficult to monitor, making temporary use of areas (such as development sites) which birdwatchers might not check before the birds have bred and then moved on to a new site in the following year. The most recent estimate of the British population was 825-1,070 pairs in 1991 (Gibbons *et al.* 1993).

Little Ringed Plover	Confirmed breeding pairs	Max. total pairs
England, SW	25	31
England, SE	59	90
England, E	44	49
England, Central	85	106
England, N	70	126
Wales	30	49
Scotland, Mid	6	6
TOTALS	319	457

Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*

One report received from outside main Scottish breeding areas. The Panel seeks only to record those away from the core breeding range, which lies north of a line from the Firth of Clyde to the Firth of Tay, and holds in the region of 840-950 pairs (Gibbons *et al.* 1993).

Scotland, S

One locality: one pair. BORDERS One locality: two in area where breeding has occurred, mid May.

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*

Two localities: three males. Although a slight improvement over 2001, again no females were seen. Monitoring the breeding performance of this species is particularly difficult without causing excessive disturbance. Like Purple Sandpiper (see below), the tenacity with which this species clings on in the UK is remarkable. Over the last 20 years, the maximum possible number of pairs (which includes the presence of displaying males without any other proof of breeding) has fluctuated between two and five, and in many years it has not been possible to confirm breeding or even the presence of females. Despite this, they continue to return each year, suggesting that successful breeding occurs with sufficient frequency to maintain this isolated population.

Scotland, N & W

Two localities: (1) two displaying males in late May and early June, but not thereafter and no proof of breeding; (2) single male displaying in mid May, but no proof of breeding.

Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima*

One locality: one pair.

Scotland, N & W

One locality: pair present, may have bred.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

Three localities: three leks. Leks were reported from the two usual localities in Cambridgeshire as well as at a loch in Orkney, but there was no indication of nesting at any of these.

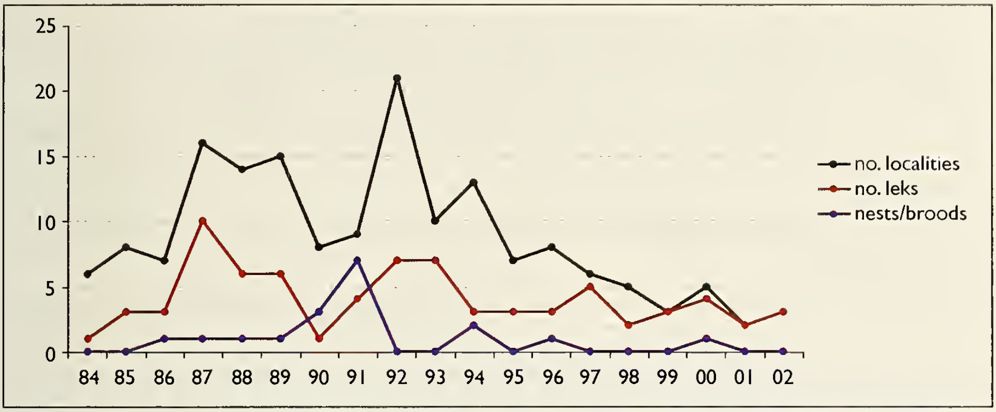


Fig. 6. Lekking Ruffs *Philomachus pugnax* persist in their attempts to attract passing females, but clearly need to try harder. There has not been a successful breeding attempt in the UK since 1996, and the number of leks continues to decline.

England, E

Two localities: two leks. CAMBRIDGESHIRE Two localities: (1) c. 30 males lekking in May; (2) seven males lekking, and three females present, in April and May. No evidence of breeding at either locality.

Scotland, N & W

One locality: one lek. ORKNEY One locality: two males lekking vigorously on 14th May; a single male was in suitable habitat nearby on 25th.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

Eight localities: 47-48 pairs breeding. There was a further drop in the number of localities where breeding godwits were reported, and eight is the lowest since 1981. Nonetheless, the number of confirmed breeding pairs is the third highest since then, bettered only by 55 in 1984 and 52 in 2001. The number of confirmed pairs has, in fact, remained fairly stable over the last six years. Notably, breeding success improved at a key site in Cambridgeshire in 2002, where flooding during the breeding season has proved disastrous in recent years.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

England, SE

Two localities: five pairs. KENT Two localities: (1) three pairs bred; (2) two pairs bred. No information on breeding success at either site.

England, E

Three localities: 34 pairs. CAMBRIDGESHIRE. Two localities: (1) 29 pairs reared at least 27 young from 81 that hatched; (2) two pairs bred, one reared two young. NORFOLK One locality: three pairs bred, two pairs fledged five young.

England, N

One locality: 1-2 pairs. LANCASHIRE & NORTH MERSEYSIDE One locality: pair hatched one young, but not thought to have fledged, plus second pair.

Scotland, N & W

Two localities: seven pairs. ORKNEY One locality: four pairs reared at least one young. SHETLAND One area: three pairs bred, two pairs each reared one young.

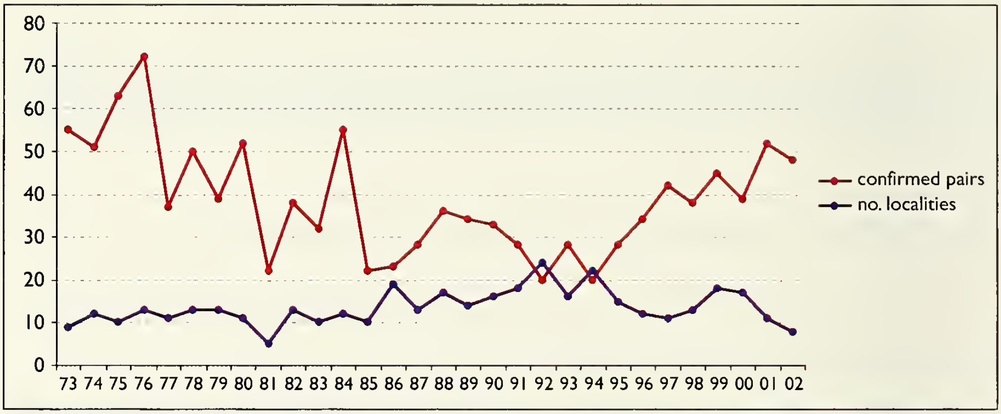


Fig. 7. Although breeding Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa* were present in just eight localities in 2002, the number of confirmed pairs was still the third highest since 1980. Breeding success was also high, particularly in Cambridgeshire, where there was thankfully no repeat of the disastrous flooding of recent springs.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

No breeding reports were received away from the species' stronghold in Orkney and Shetland. The Scottish population is estimated at 530 pairs (Stone *et al.* 1997).

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

The following limited information was received, and we repeat our appeal for information from birdwatchers visiting the Highlands. In this enormous, under-watched region, all records are welcome, in particular of displaying birds or singing males. This information can be sent to the local recorder, or directly to the Panel Secretary. The Scottish population is estimated at 1,100-1,600 pairs (Gibbons *et al.* 1993).

Scotland, N & W

ARGYLL At least one pair bred, two other possible pairs. HIGHLAND 55 pairs reported of which five proved breeding. SHETLAND Pair bred. WESTERN ISLES 12 pairs bred.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

Four localities: one pair and three males. For the fourth year running, a pair was present at the same locality, although it is not known for certain whether they bred this year. The presence of displaying males at three other sites is encouraging. The only confirmed breeding record prior to 1999 was in Inverness-shire in 1959 (*Brit. Birds* 52: 430-432).

Scotland, N & W

HIGHLAND Four localities: (1) one pair probably bred; (2)-(4) single displaying males.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

Seven localities: 4-12 pairs bred. An increase in both sites used and breeding pairs found for the second year running, following poor years in 1999-2000. Significantly, birds were found at three new (and previously unknown) localities in 2002, suggesting that others may be lurking elsewhere in the remote regions of northern Scotland.

Scotland, N & W

Seven localities: (1) four pairs bred; (2) two displaying pairs; (3) three birds, including two displaying males; (4)-(6) single pairs present; (7) single displaying male in suitable habitat.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*

Nine localities: 19 breeding males reared at least 17 young, plus at least eight males. There was a welcome further increase in the number of breeding males in Shetland during 2002 and more young reared than in either 2000 or 2001. Even though breeding was not confirmed in the Western Isles, the situation there looks decidedly promising.

Scotland, N & W

Nine localities: at least 27 males. SHETLAND Two localities: (1) 13 breeding males, at least 17 young fledged; (2) six breeding males, no young fledged. WESTERN ISLES Seven localities, but no proof of breeding: (1) four males and four females present, May-July; (2) two males and three females present, May to July; (3) pair present in June; (4) at least one pair present; (5) two birds present, May to July; (6)(7) singles in June.

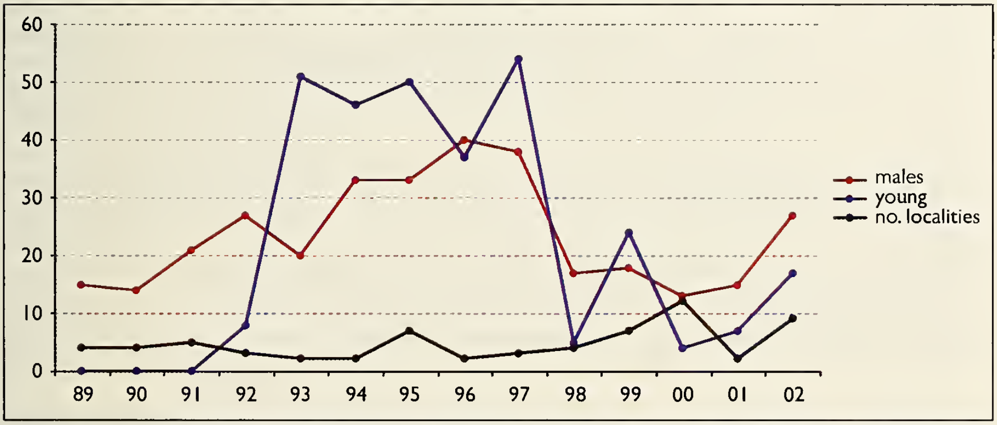


Fig. 8. Following several poor seasons, Red-necked Phalaropes *Phalaropus lobatus* finally seem to be making something of a comeback. An increase in the number of localities where breeding adults are being recorded, particularly in the Western Isles, is matched by the number of males and number of young raised, particularly in Shetland. The heady years in the mid 1990s relate chiefly to the success of birds on Fetlar, Shetland. This, at least in part, reflects successful habitat creation and management work by the RSPB, although the species' decline on Fetlar in the late 1990s remains unexplained (Pennington et *al.* 2004).

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*

17 localities: 63-75 pairs. A disappointing year, after a decade of sustained increase, with the lowest number of breeding localities reported since 1995. Although much of the decline in the number of pairs can be accounted for by poor returns at a major colony in Hampshire, which had 38 pairs in 2000, 46 in 2001 but only 19 in 2002, the data from 2001-02 suggest a downward trend, which merits careful monitoring over the coming years.

England, SW

Four localities: 20-26 pairs. HAMPSHIRE Three localities: (1) 19 pairs raised up to 11 young; (2) five pairs present, breeding status unknown; (3) pair hatched two young, unknown if fledged. ISLE OF WIGHT One locality: one pair present, but breeding not confirmed.

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*

England, SE

Nine localities: 36-41 pairs. ESSEX Three localities: (1) four pairs bred, one brood seen, fledging success unknown; (2)(3) single pairs present. KENT Three localities: (1) 12 pairs bred, success unknown; (2) eight pairs bred, fledging one young; (3) pair present. SUSSEX Three localities: (1) 12 pairs bred, fledging five young; (2) pair probably bred; (3) pair present, April to June, did not breed.

England, E

Two localities: five pairs. NORFOLK One locality: three pairs bred, two rearing six young. SUFFOLK One locality: two pairs bred, but all failed.

England, N

Two localities: 2-3 pairs. LANCASHIRE & NORTH MERSEYSIDE One locality: two pairs reared three young. NORTHUMBERLAND One locality: 1-2 adults present, but did not breed.

Mediterranean Gull	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
No. localities	14	16	16	18	24	27	28	28	22	17
Confirmed pairs	15	16	18	31	33	54	60	90	90	63
Max. total pairs	32	30	28	45	53	65	79	109	104	75

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus (cachinnans) michahellis*

Four localities: 2-3 pairs, plus one mixed pair. Unfortunately, the two pairs in Dorset, attempting to breed for the second year running, both failed.

England, SW

Two localities: two pairs. DORSET Two localities: (1)(2) single pairs bred, but eggs predated.

England, SE

One locality: one mixed pair. BEDFORDSHIRE One locality: male paired with Lesser Black-backed Gull *L. fuscus*, but did not breed.

England, E

One locality: 0-1 pairs. SUFFOLK One locality: pair displaying in mid April.

Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii*

Eight localities: 73-74 pairs reared a minimum of 90 young. A welcome increase in the number of confirmed pairs, and the highest total since 1994, largely brought about by the growth of the main colony, Coquet Island, in Northumberland, which increased from 42 pairs in 2001 to 57 pairs this year, the highest since 1975.

England, SW

One locality: one pair. HAMPSHIRE One locality: pair bred, fledging one young.

England, N

Four localities: 60 pairs. CLEVELAND One locality: pair bred, fledging two young. NORTHUMBERLAND Three localities: (1) Coquet Island: 57 pairs fledged 72 young; (2) pair reared two young; (3) pair reared one or two young.

Wales

One locality: seven pairs. ANGLESEY One locality: seven pairs raised seven young.

Scotland, Mid

One locality: 1-2 pairs. FIFE One locality: one or two pairs bred, fledging two young.

Northern Ireland

One locality: four pairs. CO. ANTRIM One locality: four pairs reared three young.

Roseate Tern	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Confirmed pairs	84	74	72	66	54	50	61	52	58	73
No. localities	18	14	15	11	14	11	8	7	7	8

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*

Summary information for each area is presented, based on a non-random sample rather than a complete survey. Until this year, Little Terns have shown a pattern of steady growth since the mid 1990s, with the greater protection of vulnerable beach-nesting colonies undoubtedly playing a significant role in this trend. Survey effort in 2002 appeared to be consistent with that in previous years, so it may be that the population is levelling out; time will tell. The current estimate of the total British breeding population during the period 1998-2002 is 1,947 pairs (Mitchell *et al.* 2004), which includes 20 pairs on the Isle of Man. Previous national seabird censuses found 2,575 pairs in 1985-88 and 1,602 in 1969-70.

Little Tern	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
England, SW	260	218	235	155	257	240
England, SE	182	152	103	199	154	175
England, E	561	642	776	694	712	618
England, NE	104	146	151	100	132	149
England, NW	9	42	50	45	55	44
Wales	80	45	86	na	85	57
Scotland	185	215	253	304	447	312
TOTALS	1,381	1,460	1,654	1,497	1,842	1,595

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*

2,022 pairs. An increase of almost 400 pairs on the totals in 2000 and 2001. Note that the figures given below are a mixture of actual counts and estimates provided. The most recent estimate of the national population is c. 4,000 pairs for 1995-97 (Toms *et al.* 2001).

England, SW

388 pairs. AVON 8. CORNWALL 5. DEVON 106. DORSET 5. GLOUCESTERSHIRE 6. HAMPSHIRE 16. ISLE OF WIGHT 42. SOMERSET 30. WILTSHIRE 170.

England, SE

272 pairs. BEDFORDSHIRE 60. BERKSHIRE 10. BUCKINGHAMSHIRE 8. ESSEX 41. HERTFORDSHIRE 8. KENT 25. OXFORDSHIRE 47. SUSSEX 73.

England, E

182 pairs. CAMBRIDGESHIRE 12. HUNTINGDON & PETERBOROUGH 12. LINCOLNSHIRE 65. NORFOLK 69. NORTHAMPTONSHIRE 14. SUFFOLK 10.

England, Central

169 pairs. DERBYSHIRE 31. HEREFORDSHIRE 1. LEICESTERSHIRE 13. NOTTINGHAMSHIRE 25. SHROPSHIRE 11. STAFFORDSHIRE 40. WARWICKSHIRE 45. WORCESTERSHIRE 3.

England, N

648 pairs. CHESHIRE & WIRRAL 55. CLEVELAND 1. CUMBRIA 114. GREATER MANCHESTER 5. LANCASHIRE & NORTH MERSEYSIDE 140. NORTHUMBERLAND 33. YORKSHIRE 300.

Wales

82 pairs. BRECON 10. CAERNARFON 1. CEREDIGION 21. DENBIGH 1. MERIONNYDD 1. MONTGOMERY 47. PEMBROKE 1.

Scotland, S

188 pairs. AYRSHIRE 6. BORDERS 82. DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY 98. LOTHIANS 2.

Scotland, Mid

22 pairs. CENTRAL 4. FIFE 5. MORAY & NAIRN 1. NORTHEAST SCOTLAND 10. PERTH & KINROSS 2.

Scotland, N & W

71 pairs. ARGYLL 58 pairs. HIGHLAND 13.

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

1,117 pairs. This is the highest total reported to the Panel since monitoring of this species began, in 1996. As in past years, however, many of the county totals are estimates based on the number of sightings during the breeding season rather than definite breeding pairs. In addition, a number of counties did not submit figures this year.

England, SW

248 pairs. AVON 30. DEVON 9. DORSET 19. HAMPSHIRE 145. SOMERSET 45.

England, SE

158 pairs. BEDFORDSHIRE 13. BERKSHIRE 15. ESSEX 19. GREATER LONDON 1. KENT 36. SURREY 16. SUSSEX 58.

England, E

105 pairs. HUNTINGDON & PETERBOROUGH 26. NORFOLK 44. SUFFOLK 35.

England, Central

216 pairs. DERBYSHIRE 6. LEICESTERSHIRE 29. NOTTINGHAMSHIRE 87. SHROPSHIRE 10. STAFFORDSHIRE 4. WARWICKSHIRE 80.

England, N

266 pairs. CHESHIRE & WIRRAL 30. GREATER MANCHESTER 33. LANCASHIRE & NORTH MERSEYSIDE c. 100. NORTHUMBERLAND 21. YORKSHIRE 82.

Wales

33 pairs. BRECON 14. CEREDIGION 2. GLAMORGAN 10. GOWER 5. PEMBROKE 2.

Scotland, S

28 pairs. BORDERS 22. LOTHIANS 6.

Scotland, Mid

61 pairs. ANGUS & DUNDEE 44. CENTRAL 4. NORTHEAST SCOTLAND 4. PERTH & KINROSS 9.

Scotland, N & W

Two pairs. HIGHLAND 2.

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*

Two localities: one pair bred, plus one possible breeding pair. This constitutes the first recorded breeding in the UK since 1955. The pair in Co. Durham attracted huge crowds when news of their presence became public knowledge, but the RSPB and Durham Wildlife Trust succeeded in ensuring that visitors to the site were able to enjoy these terrific birds without causing disturbance. All involved are to be congratulated on the successful outcome of this project.

England, N

Two localities: 1-2 pairs. CO. DURHAM One locality: pair bred at Bishop Middleham Quarry and fledged two young. YORKSHIRE One locality: four birds, either four adults or two adults and two first-summers, were present from mid July to mid August in a river valley close to a stretch with sandy banks. The observer and the County Recorder believe that the possibility of a breeding attempt, washed out by floods in July, cannot be ruled out. There is no possibility that this record involves the family from the Co. Durham site, since the young there did not fledge until mid August.

Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*

The only breeding-season report received was of a bird apparently holding territory and calling loudly in Hampshire on one day in June. If, as seems likely, this refers to a wandering male that failed to attract a mate, 2002 becomes the second blank year in succession for this species.

Wood Lark *Lullula arborea*

The following county totals were received (data show number of pairs), which are compared with those from the previous five years, including the full census in 1997. A number of County Recorders reported limited declines at some sites or that populations have stabilised after many years of increase.

Wood Lark	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Cornwall	0	0	0	0	0	0
Devon	53	7	12	10	5	9
Dorset	105	54	66	2	47	55
Hampshire	294	174	179	c. 325	158	160+
Somerset	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wiltshire	3	2	9	0	1	1
Bedfordshire	1	1	0	0	1	1
Berkshire	63	2	40	na	0	26
Buckinghamshire	6	3	5	0	1	2
Essex	0	3	2	0	0	0
Kent	3	6	1	3	4	1
Surrey	171	134	135	c. 162	133	c. 160
Sussex	71	60	61	78	44	61
Lincolnshire	37	40	51	na	44	na
Norfolk	248	326	364	c. 300	56	377
Suffolk	457	459	474	470	305	348+
Nottinghamshire	31	78	135	57	24	27
Staffordshire	7	3	0	0	0	26
Yorkshire	2	19	27	22	33	33
TOTALS	1,552	1,371	1,561	1,429	856	1,287

+ indicates a count which is known to be incomplete

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*

70 localities: 30-93 pairs breeding. The best year since 1997, which is due largely to a thorough survey of London by a group of observers working on the Black Redstart Action Plan of the London Biodiversity Partnership. In addition, there were also increased numbers breeding in those parts of Essex and Kent outside London. The Action Plan observers have also contributed records gathered in 2001 which were not available when the Panel's report for that year was compiled. Consequently, the totals in the table have been adjusted to take account of an additional 21 localities holding six breeding pairs, eight possible breeding pairs and seven singing males in 2001. Elsewhere, the picture is not so rosy, with no birds found in Greater Manchester for the first time for several years.

England, SW

One locality: 0-1 pairs. HAMPSHIRE One locality: pair probably bred.

England, SE

54 localities: 25-74 pairs. BEDFORDSHIRE One locality: singing male. BERKSHIRE Two localities: (1) pair bred, plus three singing males; (2) three pairs probably bred. ESSEX Eight localities: (1) three pairs bred; (2) pair bred; (3)-(8) single singing males. HERTFORDSHIRE Three localities: (1) two pairs bred; (2)(3) single pairs probably bred. INNER LONDON & MIDDLESEX 17 localities: (1) pair bred, plus singing male; (2)-(6) single pairs bred; (7)-(10) single pairs possibly bred; (11)-(17) single singing males. KENT 18 localities: (1) three pairs bred, plus singing male; (2) two pairs bred, third pair possibly bred; (3) two pairs bred; (4) pair bred, plus singing male; (5)-(8) single pairs bred; (9) three pairs probably bred; (10) two pairs probably bred; (11) pair probably bred, plus singing male; (12)-(14) single pairs probably bred; (15)(16) single pairs possibly bred; (17)(18) single singing males. SUSSEX Five localities: (1) pair probably bred; (2)(3) single singing males; (4) male seen in mid June; (5) juvenile on 24th June, suggesting it had been bred nearby.

England, E

12 localities: 5-15 pairs. HUNTINGDON & PETERBOROUGH One locality: singing male. NORFOLK Two localities: (1) two pairs bred; (2) probable pair present. NORTHAMPTONSHIRE One locality: pair bred. SUFFOLK Eight localities: (1) pair bred, plus two other females; (2) pair bred; (3) pair possibly bred; (4)-(8) single singing males.

England, Central

One locality: 0-1 pairs. DERBYSHIRE One locality: singing male.

England, N

Two localities: 0-2 pairs. LANCASHIRE & NORTH MERSEYSIDE Two localities: (1) male in March and September; (2) female in May-June.

Black Redstart	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
No. localities	53	66	58	46	67	71	39	39	52	70
Confirmed pairs	32	32	19	28	33	32	15	24	25	30
Max. total pairs	76	95	82	65	99	91	50	66	65	93

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*

Six localities: 1-2 pairs breeding. These were the only reports, fewer than in recent years and with none in England, but confirmed breeding for the third year running.

Scotland, N & W

HIGHLAND Two localities: (1) pair bred; (2) adult in suitable habitat.

Redwing *Turdus iliacus*

16 localities: 2-21 pairs breeding. A better showing than in the previous two years, but we reiterate our plea for all observers, especially birdwatchers visiting the Highlands, to listen out for singing birds and to report them to the local Recorder or the Panel Secretary.

Scotland, N & W

HIGHLAND 15 localities: (1)-(15) 2 pairs bred, 18 pairs or singing males. WESTERN ISLES One locality: one singing male.

Ben Green

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

851-878 singing males. A new record total, and a considerable increase over the previous record total, in 2000. Data refer to singing males.

England, SW

552-579 singing males. AVON 19. CORNWALL 12. DEVON 53-65. DORSET 68. GLOUCESTERSHIRE 4. HAMPSHIRE 180. ISLE OF WIGHT 22. SOMERSET 170-185. WILTSHIRE 24.

England, SE

63 singing males. BERKSHIRE 27. BUCKINGHAMSHIRE 1. ESSEX 12. SUSSEX 23.

England, E

194 singing males. NORFOLK 161. SUFFOLK 33.

England, Central

Four singing males. LEICESTERSHIRE 1. WARWICKSHIRE 1. WORCESTERSHIRE 2.

Wales

38 singing males. ANGLESEY 8. CARMARTHEN 3. CEREDIGION/PEMBROKE 3. GLAMORGAN 7. GOWER 17.

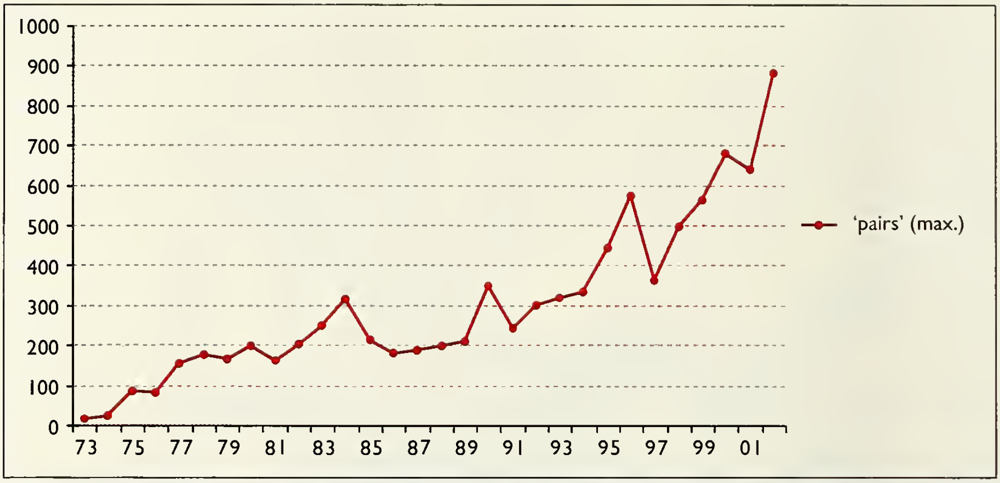


Fig. 9. Cetti's Warblers *Cettia cetti* go from strength to strength, no doubt aided by the recent run of mild winters. In 2002, 851-878 singing males were reported from 23 counties, extending as far north as Anglesey in the west and Norfolk to the east.

Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*

Six localities: 0-6 pairs. Fewer than in 2001, but still the third-highest tally since the ten in 1994.

England, SE

KENT Two localities: (1)(2) single singing males in June. SUSSEX One locality: singing male in May-June.

England, E

CAMBRIDGESHIRE One locality: singing male in May. NORFOLK Two localities: single singing males in May.

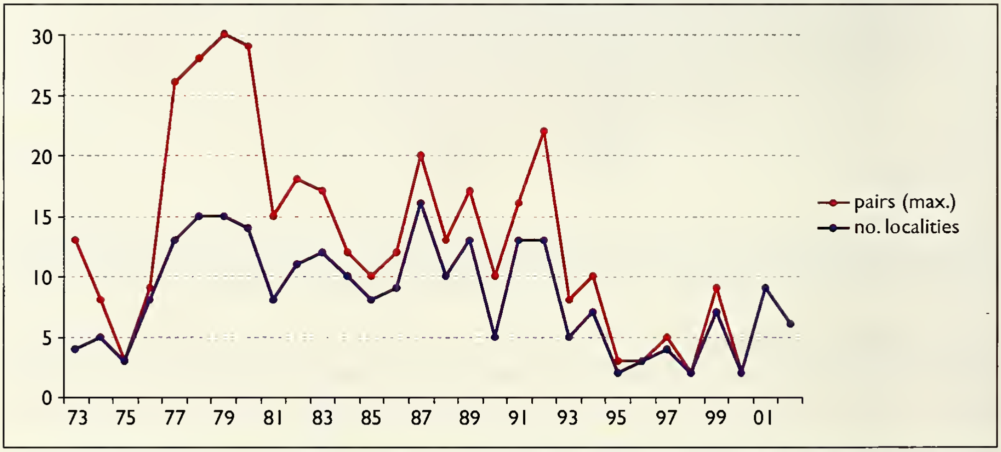


Fig. 10. The long-term fluctuations in the numbers of both Savi's Warblers *Locustella luscinioides* and the localities in which they occur is clearly demonstrated here. Numbers have now returned to those of the early 1970s, and the decision to put this species back on the BBRC list looks well-founded.

Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*

Nine localities: 0-14 pairs breeding. Thus 2002 was the worst year for this species, in terms of the number of both sites and pairs, since record collation began, in 1973.

England, SE

Seven localities: 0-4 pairs, plus eight singing males. ESSEX Two localities: (1)(2) single pairs probably bred. KENT Four localities: (1) three singing males; (2)-(4) single singing males. SUSSEX One locality: two pairs and two males

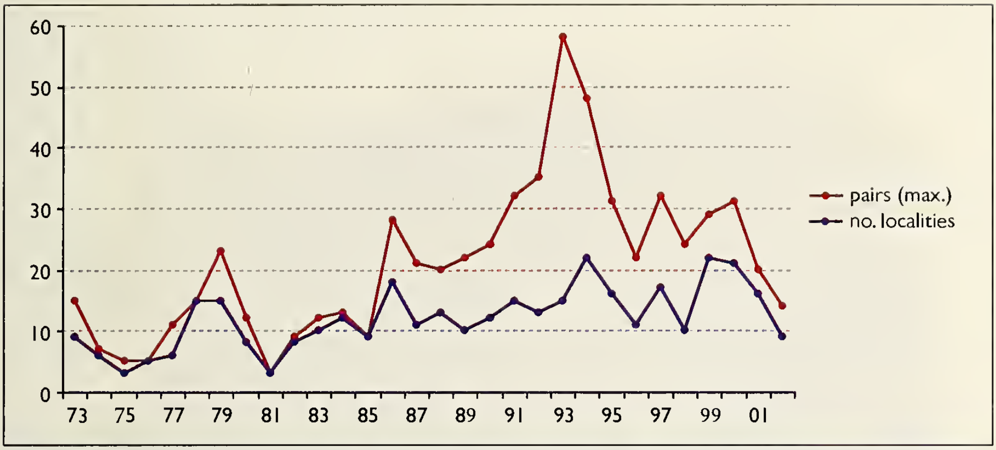


Fig. 11. Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris* remains one of Britain's rarest breeding warblers, and is clearly in trouble in the UK, even though it is an abundant breeding bird across most of northern Europe. Numbers have declined sharply over the past decade and in 2002 there were no confirmed breeding reports for the second time in three seasons. It should be noted that the Panel did not receive data from this species' former stronghold, centred on Worcestershire, during the 1970s, at a time when this population was in decline; most data from this region is omitted from fig. 11. From the 46 singing males located in 1977, it was estimated that 50-60 pairs were breeding in Worcestershire (*Brit. Birds* 72: 378).

in May and June, no evidence of breeding.

England, E

Two localities: two singing males. NORFOLK One locality: singing male in June. SUFFOLK One locality: singing male in May.

Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*

1,547 pairs. Although this total is higher than that in 2001, it still excludes the population stronghold of the New Forest. In the 1999 report, a total of 800 pairs was estimated for Hampshire, which suggests that the total UK population remains well over 2,000 pairs. The data from Somerset, Surrey and Suffolk all show an increase, but the Devon figures show a continued decline from the peak of 277 pairs in 1998.

England, SW

626-646 pairs. DEVON 160. DORSET 164. HAMPSHIRE c. 200 (excluding the New Forest). ISLE OF WIGHT 8. SOMERSET 90-110. WILTSHIRE 4.

England, SE

858 pairs. BUCKINGHAMSHIRE 1. SURREY 742. SUSSEX 115.

England, E

62 pairs. SUFFOLK 62.

Wales

One pair. GLAMORGAN 1.

Dartford Warbler	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
No. counties	11	10	12	12	11	12	11	9	12	11
Max. total pairs	1,146	1,675	1,679	552	915	947	1,747	1,925	1,203	1,547

Ben Green

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapilla*

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapilla*

33 localities or areas: 5-112 pairs breeding. Even without a repeat of the Kent Ornithological Society survey of Forest Enterprise woodlands, which last year found 19 males in nine localities, this is still the second-highest figure in these reports, with good surveys taking place in Hampshire and Sussex, and modest but encouraging increases in Buckinghamshire and Warwickshire.

England, SW

12 localities or areas: 2-63 pairs. HAMPSHIRE Two areas and two localities: (1) 39 pairs across 18 sites; (2) 10 pairs across five sites; (3)(4) two pairs. SOMERSET One locality: singing male. WILTSHIRE Seven localities: (1)(2) pairs bred; (3)(4) two singing males; (5)-(7) single singing males.

England, SE

11 localities: 2-36 pairs. BEDFORDSHIRE Two localities: (1)(2) single singing males. BUCKINGHAMSHIRE Four localities: (1) two pairs bred, plus five pairs probably bred; (2) two singing males; (3)(4) single singing males. KENT Two localities: (1) three singing males; (2) singing male. SUSSEX Three localities: (1) two pairs and 14 singing males; (2) two singing males; (3) singing male.

England, E

Seven localities: 0-8 pairs. NORFOLK Three localities: (1) pair present; (2)(3) single singing males. SUFFOLK Four localities: (1) two singing males; (2)-(4) single singing males.

England, Central

Two localities: 1-2 pairs. WARWICKSHIRE Two localities: (1) pair bred; (2) singing male.

Wales

One locality: 0-3 pairs. MONTGOMERY One locality: three pairs present.

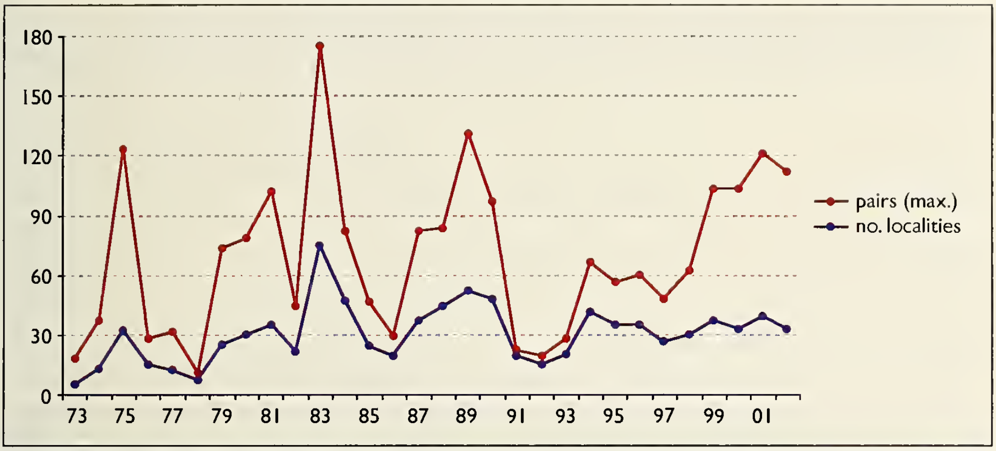


Fig. 12. Firecrest *Regulus ignicapilla* is an elusive breeding species which can be difficult to locate during the breeding season, and this is reflected here. Concerted survey effort in suitable habitat frequently produces a blip in the numbers located, as in 2001 when Kent was covered thoroughly. Although no specific surveys took place in 2002, the numbers held up well, suggesting that this attractive species may be genuinely increasing.

Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus*

504-559 pairs. The first-ever national census of this species took place in 2002, organised by the RSPB. The total of 504-559 pairs is the highest recorded since the Panel began monitoring Bearded Tits, in 1996, and compares with the 339-408 pairs estimated in 1992 by Campbell *et al.* (1996). Unfortunately, numbers at the RSPB's Leighton Moss reserve, in Lancashire, have not recovered from the population crash in 2001 caused by severe winter flooding and/or extremely poor setting of *Phragmites* seed. Elsewhere, numbers in Dorset and Scotland have also declined but these are offset to some extent by increases in other areas, particularly in eastern England. Census data from the RSPB are preliminary figures and some may be adjusted when the final census report is published.

England, SW

38-45 pairs. DORSET 18-23 pairs at six localities. HAMPSHIRE 18-20 pairs at four localities. SOMERSET One locality: two pairs.

England, SE

105-123 pairs. ESSEX 19-20 pairs at six localities. KENT 77-91 pairs at 11 localities. SUSSEX 9-12 pairs at four localities.

England, E

295-314 pairs. LINCOLNSHIRE Two pairs at one locality. NORFOLK 173-180 pairs at 21 localities. SUFFOLK 120-132 pairs at ten localities.

England, N

52-56 pairs. LANCASHIRE & NORTH MERSEYSIDE 10-14 pairs at one locality. YORKSHIRE 42 pairs at four localities.

Wales

0-1 pairs. CEREDIGION Single in May at suitable locality.

Scotland, Mid

14-20 pairs. PERTH & KINROSS Survey of part of one extensive locality found 14-20 pairs.

Bearded Tit	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Min. total pairs	221	258	384	368	483	385	504
Max. total pairs	232	291	396	373	520	396	559

Crested Tit *Parus cristatus*

The only information received is set out below. The estimated total population is 900 pairs (Gibbons *et al.* 1993).

Scotland, Mid

MORAY & NAIRN Estimated county total 50-100 pairs. NORTHEAST SCOTLAND Six pairs bred in nestboxes; the county total is estimated at 50-100 pairs.

Scotland, N & W

HIGHLAND A single nestbox had a brood of six which fledged, but there was no estimate of the number breeding in the core area of Badenoch and Strathspey.

Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*

Eight localities: 4-8 pairs breeding. Within the East Anglian study area, 37 of a possible 51 sites were visited, with the presence of birds being confirmed at just eight of these. Breeding was confirmed at four sites, with at least one fledged young being seen or heard at all four. There was also an extra male present at one of the four sites, while one or two birds were reported at four more. These results establish 2002 as the worst year for Golden Orioles in Britain since the 1970s. For the second year running, there were no reports of any territorial males outside the study area.

Golden Oriole	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Confirmed pairs	14	7	8	7	9	10	5	5	3	4
Max. total pairs	33	35	35	22	24	22	24	20	11	8
No. localities	33	34	34	22	23	19	24	20	11	8

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*

Three localities: 0-3 pairs breeding. Two reports of males in Highland region in May and a singing male in Fife in June are perhaps worth reporting. A handful of records of single birds, seen briefly in England, have been omitted as they almost certainly refer to migrants. The last confirmed breeding was in 1999.

Scotland, Mid

FIFE One locality: male singing on 20th June.

Scotland, N

HIGHLAND Two localities: (1) male on 22nd May; (2) male on 29th May.

Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*

Red-billed Chough	Occupied sites	Successful pairs	Young reared	Young/ territorial pair
Cornwall	1	1	3	3.00
Anglesey	4	2	na	–
Caernarfon	7	7	28	4.00
Ceredigion	30	26*	na	–
Glamorgan	1	na	na	–
Gower	1	1	1	1.00
Pembroke	1	1	1	1.00
Dumfries & Galloway	1	1	1	1.00
Colonsay & Oronsay	8	6	20	2.50
Islay	61	37	93	1.52
Antrim	0	0	0	0
TOTALS	115	82	147	1.28

*No. of pairs proved to breed

In England, a pair bred in Cornwall, for the first time for over 50 years. Islay was surveyed more completely than in some recent years. Although these figures suggest that more Red-billed Choughs bred in Scotland than in Wales, there were incomplete/no reports received from several Welsh counties and the Isle of Man.

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*

One locality: one pair. The second year running in which breeding has been confirmed after a gap of seven years.

Scotland, N & W

HIGHLAND One locality: pair bred and fledged three young.

Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*

The following information was received for England and Wales. The few Scottish records received are not presented. There was a considerable irruption into England in the second half of the year, so can more breeding records be anticipated in 2003?

England, SW

DEVON 12 localities. DORSET Nine localities. HAMPSHIRE Seven localities. SOMERSET 2-5 pairs.

England, SE

SUSSEX Nine pairs.

England, E

NORFOLK Four pairs. SUFFOLK 16 pairs.

England, Central

DERBYSHIRE Two pairs. NOTTINGHAMSHIRE Nine pairs.

England, N

CHESHIRE & WIRRAL Two localities. LANCASHIRE & NORTH MERSEYSIDE One pair. YORKSHIRE 21 pairs.

Wales

GLAMORGAN Six pairs. GOWER 1-2 pairs. GWENT Five localities.

Scottish Crossbill *Loxia scotica*

No detailed reports were received from the two main study areas, so this information merely confirms that breeding actually occurred in 2002. See Summers *et al.* (2002) for more information on the distribution and habitats of this species. No data are available on populations.

Scotland, N & W

Four localities: Abernethy Forest RSPB reserve: 10+ pairs, identified by sonograms of calls and songs; Corrimony RSPB reserve: at least 2-5 pairs; (3)(4) single pairs bred.

Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus*

The distribution, status and breeding biology of this species were discussed recently (Summers 2002; Summers *et al.* 2002), but neither paper gave any estimate of population size, which is still not known.

Scotland, N & W

HIGHLAND At least 30 pairs at the RSPB Abernethy Forest reserve, five of them rearing 15 young.

Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*

In Devon, a partial census, based on a 50% sample of tetrads within the known range, produced a minimum population estimate of 576 pairs. A full survey was carried out in 2003 (Wotton *et al.* 2004).

Acknowledgments

The hard work and willing co-operation of numerous individuals, the county, regional and local recorders throughout the UK, and many specialist study groups and conservation organisations, is gratefully acknowledged. The Panel, and in particular the Secretary, would like to express sincere thanks to all those individuals whose fieldwork produced the observations which form the basis for this report. Important information for many species was also supplied by English Nature (EN), Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), the Countryside Commission for Wales (CCW), the BTO and the RSPB, and the Panel gratefully acknowledges their efforts and role they played in the production of this important report.

We wish to extend particular thanks to Jake Allsopp and the Golden Oriole Group, Stuart Benn, Roger Broad, Dave Butterfield, Ian Carter, Tony Cross and the Welsh Kite Trust, Roy Dennis, Dusty Gedge and the Black Redstart Action Plan Group, Gillian Gilbert, Bob Image, Carl Mitchell, Dave Redding, Sabine Schmitt and Simon Wotton, who all supplied information for their particular specialities. Thanks are also due to the members of the Scottish, Welsh, Cumbrian and Wiltshire Raptor Study Groups, the Sea Eagle Project Team, and the Osprey Study Group, who monitor the important raptor populations in their respective regions.

Last but by no means least, we are particularly grateful to the licensing officers of the three country agencies – Jo Oldaker (EN), John Ralston (SNH) and Sian Whitehead (CCW) – for their ready co-operation in supplying information.

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Audouin's Gull: new to Britain

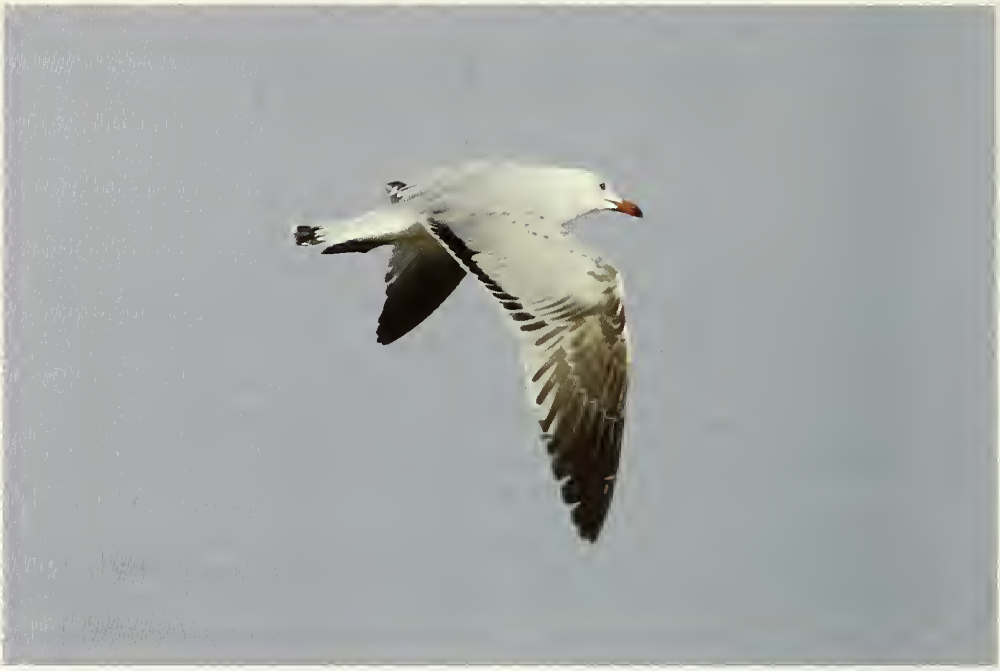
David Walker

ABSTRACT A second-summer Audouin's Gull *Larus audouinii* was found at Dungeness, Kent, on 5th May 2003. It lingered in the area for the remainder of the day, commuting between the shore and nearby pools on the RSPB reserve. It was present again the following day, enabling several hundred observers to see it, and was also seen at roost on 7th May. This is the first record for Britain, and is almost certainly the same individual as that recorded in The Netherlands on 1st May 2003.

On the morning of 5th May 2003, I had gone to the seawatch hide at Dungeness, Kent, but after staring out to sea for about 45 minutes, the only bird of interest I had seen was a passing Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*. In desperation, I began scanning through a large gathering of gulls *Larus* feeding along the surf line, which included several Mediterranean Gulls *L. melanocephalus*. At about 12.00 hrs, as I continued to look for 'Caspian Gulls' *L. (c.) cachinnans* and 'Yellow-legged Gulls' *L. (c.) michahellis*, I noticed an unfamiliar gull flying along the beach towards me from the east, initially some 250-300 m away. It had an upperwing pattern somewhat similar to that of a first-summer Mediterranean Gull, but this was clearly something quite different, and considerably larger. As it flew by, I was convinced that it had a red base to the bill and I recognised the bird almost instantly as an Audouin's Gull *L. audouinii*! I yelled to the one person nearby to 'get on this bird!!'. I knew that there had been a second-summer Audouin's Gull in The Netherlands a few days earlier, and had even joked about it appearing at Dungeness, but surely this would not really happen? In stunned silence the two of us watched the bird as it circled around the hide and then over the top of the power station before flying back east and, worryingly, out of sight.

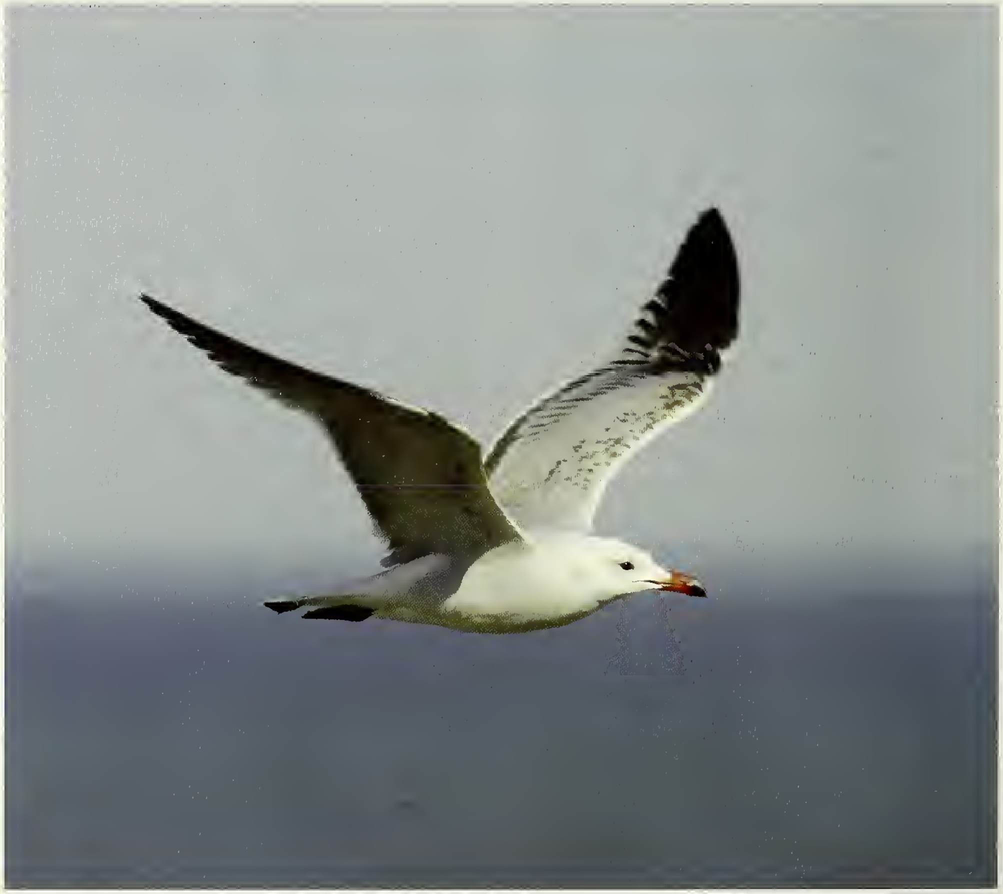
Once over the initial shock, I was still sure that it had to be an Audouin's Gull, and most likely the same bird as the one seen in The Netherlands. I was well aware that it would be the first for Britain, but who would believe me given such brief views? After all, there is a widespread assumption that a 'first' for Britain should, ideally, be seen by many observers, and, furthermore, that a seabird record such as this must be photographed. Clearly, I needed some help to relocate the bird and I phoned my assistant, Andy Wraithmell (AW). Thankfully, some 15 minutes later, AW relocated the gull near 'the Patch' (the outflow from the power station), flying along the beach, then over the power station and inland towards the RSPB reserve. Mightily reassured that I had not gone completely mad, I called Ray Turley (RT) at home and explained the situation, suggesting that he go to the RSPB reserve to check the gulls, while we maintained a vigil at the Patch. RT, Anna Hughes and Charles Wilkins rushed to the reserve and, with his first scan of the islands from the Firth Hide, RT picked out the bird among the roosting Herring *L. argentatus* and Great Black-backed Gulls *L. marinus*. A flurry of radio and telephone calls were made and the hide rapidly filled with reserve staff and local birders.

At 13.10 hrs, the bird flew off, again in the direction of the power station. It was assumed to have gone back towards the Patch, and many of the Dungeness regulars spread out in an effort to relocate it. For over half an hour there was no further sign of it but, at about 13.45 hrs, it was again seen flying over the power station and back towards the reserve. During this time I had remained in the Firth Hide, and a phone call alerted me to its imminent arrival. This time, the critical photographs and video record-



Nigel Blake

308 & 309. Second-summer Audouin's Gull *Larus audouinii*, Dungeness, Kent, May 2003. The first record for Britain.



Nigel Blake

ings were obtained at last, as it flew back onto the island.

Present throughout the remainder of that day, and much of the following day (6th May), the Audouin's Gull gave often brilliant views to an estimated 1,400 birders who travelled to see it, and huge numbers of photographs and many hours of video footage were taken. It was not seen on 7th May until the evening, when it came in to roost on the RSPB reserve for what proved to be its final sighting.

Description

The bird was seen extremely well at times, in a variety of light conditions, both at rest and in flight. The first views of the bird were in flight as it came towards me, more or less at eye level. At this stage it looked like a large first-summer Mediterranean Gull, but lacking any significant head markings. The mantle was uniform light grey and the wings appeared to have obvious, unmarked, black primaries. As it passed me, I noted a black secondary bar and a white tail with a narrow black subterminal band. The head was white and the underparts appeared white but with a smoky-grey wash around the sides of the breast. The bill looked large, with extensive bright red at the base and tipped black, while the eye appeared large and dark. As the bird circled and climbed above me, I could see that the underwings were mainly white but with obvious contrasting black wing-tips.

My next views of the bird were on the reserve, at a range of about 270 m. Here, it was possible to confirm most of the features seen in flight. In comparison with Herring Gulls, it was distinctly smaller but with noticeably long wings, giving a elegant, elongated shape. The tertials were dark brown with broad, uneven white fringes, and the bend of the wing was also dark brown, formed by dark centres to many of the lesser coverts. The legs were relatively short and dark grey. The bill pattern was striking, with a rich scarlet base and a solidly black tip.

When the bird left the reserve and went to roost on the beach at the Point, more features were noted. The bill was short and stout, lacked an obvious gonydeal angle and was quite blunt-tipped. Although the head shape seemed to vary somewhat, it generally appeared to have a long, sloping forehead and a slightly peaked crown behind the eye, which combined to give a 'snouty' appearance not unlike the head shape of some Caspian Gulls. The gape was long and extended almost to the eye, and the feathering at the base of the bill was extensive. The lower nape showed a few faint, dark brown spots and streaks, which at times produced a 'necklace effect' to the head. The head was mostly white except for a subtle pale grey shadow around the eye. The eye was dark with no hint of a paler iris and the orbital ring was white. The colour of the underparts varied with the angle and intensity of the light, but is best described as a beautiful, satin grey which contrasted with the pure white head. When the bird stretched its wing, the broad black secondary bar was visible and it was apparent that the secondaries were broadly tipped white. The primary tips on the closed wing were uniformly black and there was no hint of any white mirrors on the underside of the primaries.

On 6th May, the bird spent most of the day roosting on the shingle beach at Dungeness. On at least one occasion, however, it disappeared out to sea, returning about an hour later. In the late afternoon, it gave brilliant flight views as it patrolled along the beach and at this point it was possible to see fairly precise details of the wing and tail patterns. The outer five primaries were black and the inner primaries were medium grey, with black tongues along the outer webs, decreasing in extent inwards. All the primary coverts, and the alula, were black. The lesser coverts contained a mixture of recently moulted grey feathers and unmoulted dull brown feathers. The secondaries were black with broad white tips, giving a white trailing edge to the inner wing. The rump was white and squarely cut off from the grey mantle. The uppertail-coverts were white. The rectrices were white with a broad black subterminal band and inward extension of black along the feather shafts. There was no sign of any active wing or tail moult.

Behaviour

Although the bird was often seen roosting with other gulls, it would frequently fly off or stand alone on the beach. It was rarely seen to feed, but on the afternoon of 6th May, it was watched as it picked small food items from the sea surface. It was always graceful in flight, often gliding long distances on slightly arched wings with very few wingbeats. I did not hear it call.

Breeding range

As a breeding bird, Audouin's Gull is restricted to the Mediterranean basin where it breeds in several small colonies, mainly on islets or small, rocky offshore islands; but also in two major Spanish colonies, the Ebro Delta and the Chafarinas Islands, off the north coast of Morocco (these two colonies accounted for approximately 70% of the world population in 1989; Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). Unusually, the Ebro Delta colony, which became established as recently as 1981, is situated at the tip of a long, sandy peninsula. Until recently, Audouin's Gull numbers were low and thought to be declining, the total population estimated to be between 800 and 1,000 pairs in 1966. Since then, the population in the western Mediterranean has undergone a rapid expansion, particularly in the Ebro Delta and on the Chafarinas Islands. This increase averaged 10-11% annually and, by 1993, c. 9,373 pairs bred in the Ebro Delta, and 3,540 pairs in the Chafarinas Islands (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). Subsequently, the rate of increase has slowed, with c. 11,328 pairs in the Ebro Delta in 1996, falling to 10,500 pairs by 2000. Breeding was recorded for the first time in the Algarve, Portugal, in 2001, and again in 2002. While numbers in the western Mediterranean have increased rapidly, those breeding to the east, in Lebanon, Turkey, Cyprus and Greece, have not shown a corresponding increase. Outside the breeding season, the bulk of the population migrates through the Strait of Gibraltar to winter along the Atlantic coast of Africa between Morocco and Senegal.

Extralimital occurrences within Europe

Despite wintering alongside Lesser Black-backed Gulls *L. fuscus* that breed in north-western Europe, and migrating north with them, Audouin's Gull remains an extreme rarity north of the Mediterranean. The huge increase in the Audouin's Gull population in the western Mediterranean, together with the growth in numbers of observers actively searching through gull flocks in northern Europe, has not resulted in a corresponding increase in the number of birds being discovered. Over the past ten years, records to the north of the Mediterranean have averaged less than one per year. Of these, most have occurred around the southern shores of the North Sea but, perhaps surprisingly, have included inland birds at Lac Léman, which were seen in both Switzerland and France. Records of Audouin's Gull north of the Mediterranean region since 1995 are summarised below, with data supplied by Philippe J. Dubois or taken from the Western Palearctic year summary accounts published annually in *Birding World*:

1995: **France**; second-summer/third-winter at Boulogne-sur-Mer, Pas-de-Calais, 15th June to 27th August, the first record for northern France (Hoogendoorn 1995).
1996: **France**; adult, Saint-Nazaire, Loire-Atlantique, 22nd January.
1997: **Germany**; adult following a ship 20 km east of Helgoland, 16th July, the first record for Germany (Flore 1997).
1998: **Switzerland and France**; first-winter at Lac Léman, 3rd-9th September, the third record for Switzerland (and also seen in adjacent regions of France).
2000: **France**; juvenile at Lège-Cap-Ferret, Gironde, 8th October 2000.
2001: **France**; adult at Audinghen, Pas-de-Calais, 9th May 2001.
France and Switzerland; juvenile with Italian ring, inland at Sechex/Margencel, Haute-Savoie, Lac Léman, 16th August. Same individual at Allaman, Switzerland, on 18th August, where it was the fourth record for that country. Originally ringed as a pullus on Pianosa Island, Tuscany, Italy, in June 2001.
2003: **Netherlands**; second-summer, at Neeltje Jans, Zeeland, 1st May, the first record for The Netherlands (and almost certainly the same individual as the Dungeness bird; see below).
Germany; second-winter, at Sylt, Schleswig-Holstein, on 14th November, the second record for Germany.

This record has been accepted unanimously by BBRC, and added to the British List by BOURC (see below). There is little doubt that this is the same bird which occurred in The Netherlands a few days earlier, and which has been accepted onto the Dutch List (Wolf 2004). This bird was found by Pim Wolf on 1st May 2003, who described the circumstances of its discovery as follows:

'Large groups of gulls can be found throughout the year in the delta area in the southwestern corner of The Netherlands. Careful scrutiny of these groups has yielded many scarce and rare species as well as interesting ring-readings. It was for this last purpose that I decided to visit the former island of Noordland, now part of the Oosterschelde storm surge barrier dam, and colloquially known as Neeltje Jans, on 1st May 2003. At 12.55 hrs, I focussed my telescope on a group of c. 110 mostly subadult 'large white-headed gulls'. Almost immediately, I noticed a medium-sized gull with a pale grey mantle, long bluish-grey legs and a very striking reddish bill. When the bird stretched one of its wings, revealing a pattern reminiscent of first-summer Mediterranean Gull, it became obvious that this had to be a second-summer Audouin's Gull! Its presence was quickly relayed to Dutch birders through our equivalent of a pager service, and within half an hour several local birders managed to see the bird and the record photographs where obtained. During its stay of at least two hours, the bird stood around calmly in the group of mostly Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls. At around 15.00 hrs it flew off (of its own accord!) towards the south with several other gulls. Despite careful searching it was not seen again until it resurfaced in Dungeness. Owing to the fact that it was on view for only two hours, the bird was seen by just over 20, mostly local, birders.' See *Dutch Birding* 25: plates 183, 230 & 231; Wolf (2004).

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Pim Wolf for supplying the details of his discovery of the Dutch bird at Neeltje Jans, and to Philippe J. Dubois for his help in providing details of French records of Audouin's Gull north of the Mediterranean.

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EDITORIAL COMMENT Colin Bradshaw, Chairman of the British Birds Rarities Committee commented: 'Audouin's Gull has been high on the list of likely new species for Britain and many keen birders have been waiting for one to turn up. Bearing in mind the record in Pas-de-Calais in 1995, Dungeness was always a likely spot and BBRC is delighted that Dave Walker has got his due reward for a lot of hard work on the gulls of this area. Although not a full adult, this was still a classic individual and the combination of detailed notes and superb photos made this an easy record for us to assess. This is a relatively straightforward gull to identify in all plumages after first-year, but juvenile or first-year Audouin's Gull is a more difficult identification challenge and will require careful documentation to eliminate other large white-headed gulls of an equivalent age.'

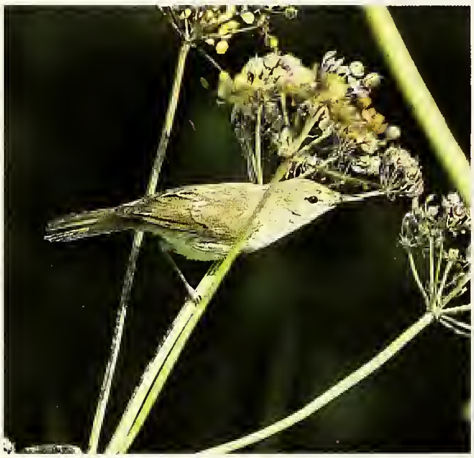
Eric Meek, Chairman of the British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee, commented: 'The BOURC was extremely impressed by the quality of the material submitted to substantiate this record. The detailed documentation, together with the excellent photographs, left no doubt as to the identification and, there being virtually no escape risk, the decision to admit Audouin's Gull to the British List was a straightforward one.'

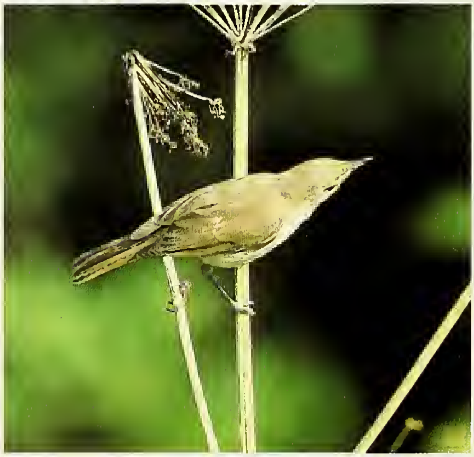
The Carl Zeiss Award 2004

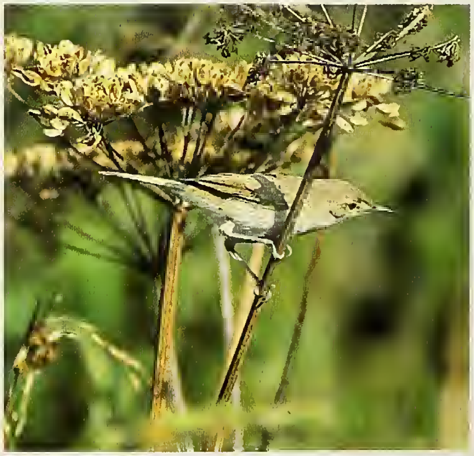
One of the difficulties for the judging panel of the Carl Zeiss Award, for photographs of rarities assessed by the BBRC during the preceding year, is that we have to think of something new to say in our report each year. This year it was easy, in fact it was a landmark year for the judging system. For the first time, the vast majority of photographs were submitted as digital images; consequently, the judging was carried out indoors, around a table with a computer, rather than sitting in the garden drinking wine and reviewing a large file of prints and slides. In addition, since the marginal cost of extra frames is nil when using a digital camera, we often had 10-15 images of a particular rarity from a photographer, while in previous years 2-3 was the norm.

The judging brief is to decide on the most instructive photograph, or set of photographs, of a British rarity. We are thus not looking for artistic merit but for whether an image shows (for example) a rarely seen identification feature or can have a significant influence upon the decision made by BBRC. Carl Zeiss Ltd, sponsors of the BBRC, award a pair of Carl Zeiss Victory binoculars to the winner of this competition, in recognition of the importance of photographs and photographers to the record-assessment procedure.

The process of selecting a shortlist from the many images submitted with records begins during the record assessment itself, as BBRC members flag up anything that strikes them as appropriate for the award. It is fascinating that passerines or non-passerines seem to predominate in different years, and it is rare that we have

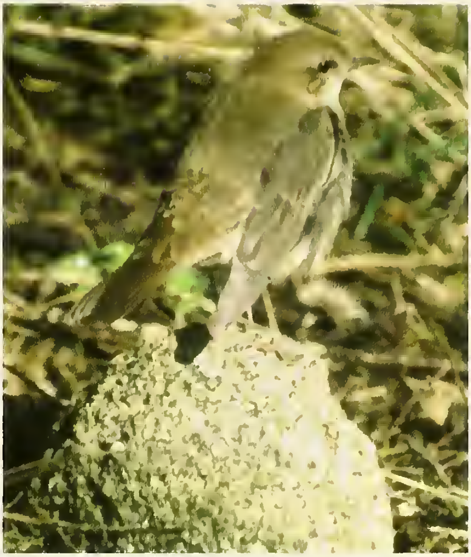

Les Bird


Les Bird


Les Bird

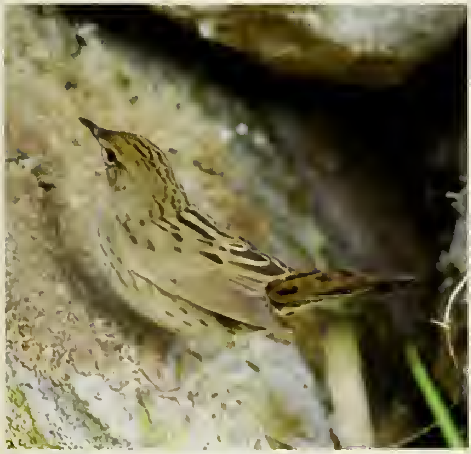
310-312. Carl Zeiss Award 2004 winner: Sykes's Warbler *Hippolais rama*, Beachy Head, East Sussex, August 2002.

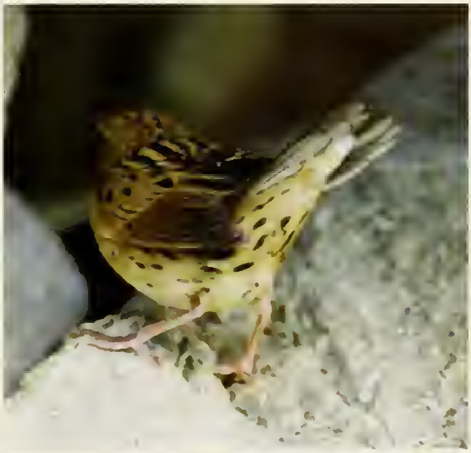
a mixed bag. This year was no exception, and only passerines made it onto our shortlist, although Gary Bellingham's American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*, photographed while taking off and showing the whole of the underwing, and the first-winter Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida* by Dave Walker came extremely close. Both of these photos will be in the BBRC annual report next month. Nonetheless, four sets of photographs were finally established as comprising our shortlist, featuring the following species: Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* of the central Asian race *hafizi* (Colin Bradshaw); Lanceolated Warbler *Locustella lanceolata* (Michael McKee); Sykes's Warbler *Hippolais rama* (Les Bird); and Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides* of the east Asian form *plumbeitarsus*, generally referred to as 'Two-barred Greenish Warbler' (Bryan Thomas). The photographs of the Lanceolated and Two-barred Greenish Warblers were superb, and both sets not only showed the key identification features but were also aesthetically pleasing. In another year, either may well have won the competition, although it would also be true to say that both of these records would probably have been accepted even without these photographs. The Lanceolated Warbler series showed the all-important undertail-covert markings, the pattern of the tertials, and the nature of the streaking on the underparts, while the Two-barred Greenish photos highlighted the similarity of the facial pattern to Arctic Warbler *P. borealis* and the double wing-bars.


Colin Bradshaw

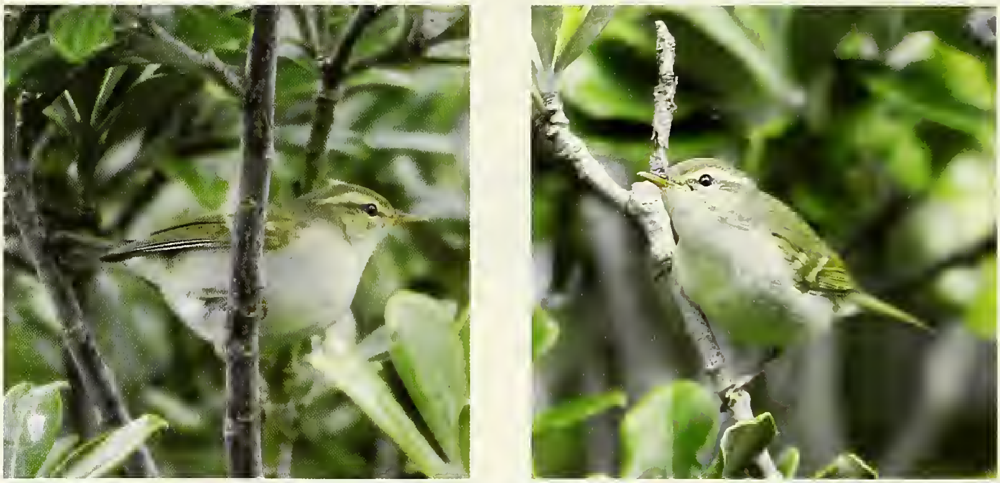
313. Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* of the central Asian race *hafizi*, St Agnes, Scilly, October 1987.

The Zeiss Award was, however, really designed for images such as those in the two remaining sets of photographs. Neither *hafizi* Common Nightingale nor Sykes's Warbler are species that BBRC feels particularly confident in assessing. The photos of the St Agnes nightingale not only show the supercilium and greyish coloration typical of this race, but they also emphasise the rangy shape, somewhat reminiscent of a Rufous Bush Robin *Cercotrichas galactotes*, the wing-bars and, most intriguingly, pale crescent-shaped tips to the uppertail-coverts – a feature that we have subsequently found on all photos of this race that we have been able to track down, no matter what the age. While the submitted descriptions of this bird are compelling, we are in no doubt that this record


Michael McKee


Michael McKee

314 & 315. Lanceolated Warbler *Locustella lanceolata*, Out Skerries, Shetland, October 2003.



316 & 317. Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides* of the east Asian form *plumbeitarsus*, Bryher, Scilly, September 2003.

would not have been accepted but for the photographs.

BBRC has found the assessment of in-hand records of Sykes's Warbler problematic, as the key differences between this and Booted Warbler *H. caligata* are relatively small and (in the case of bill dimensions at least) difficult to measure. Les Bird's photographs of the Beachy Head Sykes's Warbler suggest, however, that the sum of these minor differences may produce a subtly distinctive jizz which may possibly make it easier to identify this species in the field than the hand. The photographs show a consistently long-billed, long-tailed and short-winged *Acrocephalus*-like warbler, completely lacking the more gentle, *Phylloscopus*-like characteristics of Booted Warbler, with uniform upperparts and wings, and an indistinct facial pattern. Once again, excellent though the descriptions were, we have little doubt that it was the photographs that made the crucial difference in this case and allowed this record to be accepted. As such, this set of photographs of Sykes's Warbler is a worthy winner of the Carl Zeiss Award 2004.

We are, as always, grateful to Carl Zeiss Ltd for their sponsorship of BBRC and of this competition.

318. Presentation of the Carl Zeiss Award, at the *British Birds* stand at the British Birdwatching Fair, Rutland Water, August 2004. Sadly, the winner, Les Bird, was unable to attend, owing to a family wedding during the Birdfair weekend, but his prize was received on his behalf by *BB* editor Roger Riddington. Pictured here, from left, Roger Riddington, John Cockerill (Carl Zeiss Ltd), Chris Kehoe, Colin Bradshaw and Adrian Pitches, the last three comprising this year's judging panel. Note the contrasting styles of footwear, reflecting the Rutland weather.

Colin Bradshaw, Chris Kehoe and Adrian Pitches
c/o 9 Tynemouth Place, Tynemouth, Tyne & Wear NE30 4BJ

The British Birds Rarities Committee is sponsored by Carl Zeiss Ltd

Conservation research news

Compiled by James Pearce-Higgins, Rowena Langston and Gillian Gilbert

Nest-site competition in Common Guillemots

One of the assumptions that scientists often make about territorial birds is that individuals will choose the best breeding sites available. Consequently, when populations are small, every individual occupies a high-quality site but, as populations grow, an increasing proportion of individuals are forced to use lower-quality sites. As a result, overall breeding success declines and the population growth rate falls, producing a density-dependent population regulator. This process is difficult to study in the field, but a recent paper by Kokko *et al.* (2004) examines how it works in detail.

The authors studied Common Guillemots *Uria aalge* on the Isle of May, Fife, monitoring nest-site occupancy and breeding success from 1981 to 2000, during which time the population increased from 11,250 to 18,000 breeding pairs. Nest-site quality was assessed from the mean number of chicks produced per breeding attempt at that site, and was related to physical characteristics (number of surrounding walls, slope, etc.). As expected, sites that were occupied every year were of the highest quality while, as an increasing proportion of low-quality sites were occupied, average breeding success decreased. Furthermore, there was some evidence that more adults died in years when there was a greater occupancy of poor-quality nest-sites, which suggested an additional mechanism underlying the observed density-dependent population regulation.

What was particularly novel about this study was the authors' ability to observe known (colour-ringed) individuals; consequently, they could record changes in territory occupancy. Although Common Guillemots are extremely site faithful, a small minority move nest-sites between years, although normally only by a couple of metres. These changes occur as a result of either the death of the previous occupant of another nest-site, or fights between individuals resulting in a takeover. In situations where an individual dies, the likelihood of that nest-site being reoccupied was positively related to its quality. Where a takeover occurred, the successful birds invariably moved to a better site, while defeated birds forced from good sites often failed to breed for several years, before eventually re-nesting on a poor-quality site. The aggressors clearly initiated an attempted territory-shift in order to improve their subsequent breeding success, but what triggers the decision to attempt such a takeover? From observations of individual birds, it was clear that most such takeovers followed breeding failure during the previous year, and were most common if the aggressor was occupying a poor-quality site. Therefore, individuals pursue a strategy to maximise their long-term reproductive output, which produces the observed density-dependence at the population level.

This study was conducted during a time when the Common Guillemot population on the Isle of May was increasing. Given the poor breeding success currently being experienced by this and other seabird species as a result of a shortage of available sandeels *Ammodytes*, it is important to continue this research in order to predict future impacts of environmental change at the population level.

Kokko, H., Harris, M. P., & Wanless, S. 2004. Competition for breeding sites and site-dependent population regulation in a highly colonial seabird, the Common Guillemot *Uria aalge*. *J. Anim. Ecol.* 73: 367-376.

Impact of windfarms on birds

Windfarms continue to divide opinion among conservationists. On the one hand they have the potential to harness a natural and renewable energy resource, while on the other they are considered potentially damaging to wildlife, and birds in particular. There are few published accounts of the impact of wind turbines on birds, but recently, two have appeared, based upon work at Tarifa, a major migration route on the Spanish side of the Strait of Gibraltar.

Luis Barrios and Alejandro Rodriguez measured bird mortality and analysed factors that led birds to fly close to turbines, and proposed mitigation measures at two windfarms near Tarifa. The authors found that, during the year of their study, mortality attributable to wind turbines was highest for resident species, mostly Griffon Vultures *Gyps fulvus* (30 individuals) and Common Kestrels *Falco tinnunculus* (12). Many of the vulture collisions occurred in autumn/winter and were concentrated along two particular lines of turbines. The absence of thermals in winter forced vultures to use slopes for lift, in some cases bringing them close to the turbines. It was thought that this was the most likely mechanism influencing both their exposure to turbines and collision mortality. Kestrel collisions occurred during their annual peak of abundance, in summer, and their susceptibility was attributed to the prevalence of their preferred hunting habitat at one windfarm.

At another windfarm near Tarifa, Manuela de Lucas and her colleagues made observations of the flight behaviour of both local breeding and migratory birds, in order to assess bird mortality caused by collision. They observed changes in flight direction close to turbines, primarily to avoid operational turbines, but did not detect any effect on the overall abundance of soaring birds within the windfarm area when compared with two control areas. Just two collision fatalities were found during the twice-weekly bird-corpse searches throughout the 14-month study, although no scavenger removal experiments were carried out and searches were restricted to non-passerines. This windfarm was considered to be of low risk, probably because most flight activity through the study area involved birds on active migration, often well above the height of the turbines.

As highlighted by the authors of both these studies, detailed behavioural observations and understanding of the ways in which birds use a proposed windfarm site are important so that turbines can be sited in such a way as to minimise the risks of collision.

Barrios, L. & Rodriguez, A. 2004. Behavioural and environmental correlates of soaring-bird mortality at on-shore wind turbines. *J. Appl. Ecol.* 41: 72-81.

de Lucas, M., Janss, G. F. E., & Ferrer, M. 2004. The effects of a wind farm on birds in a migration point: the Strait of Gibraltar. *Biodiversity and Conservation* 13: 395-407.

Effects of persecution on Golden Eagles

There have been few quantified examples of the impact of persecution on the dynamics of any raptor population. Although the Scottish Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* population is relatively stable at about 420 pairs, there are many unexpected gaps in their distribution and areas of poor breeding success. These are attributed to the effects of persecution, notably in the central and eastern Highlands and in upland areas south of the Highlands, where moorland management for Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus* shooting occurs.

To quantify this, Phil Whitfield and his colleagues used a comprehensive dataset on the age structure of the Golden Eagle population to derive measures of typical life-history parameters (e.g. adult survival, productivity, pre-adult survival). These were then used to construct a statistical, computerised model that could predict how the Scottish population might fare 30 years into the future with and without persecution. Twenty years of data on the distribution of poisoning incidents, which are spatially associated with several aspects of the eagles' life history, were used as a measure of persecution.

In the most affected regions, fledgling production was reduced through persecution by an estimated 20%, and annual adult mortality similarly reduced by an estimated 3-5%. Pre-adult survival was an important factor in the model, as immature eagles tend to be killed when attracted to areas with a good food supply where adults have already been removed through persecution. As this was a difficult

319. Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*, Strathspey, March, year unknown.

Peter Cairn/Windrush

parameter to estimate, several possible values were used.

When the model was run using parameters estimated from current real levels of persecution, it was found that the eagle population was highly likely to decline. The current stability is likely to reflect the buffering effect of a lowering of the breeding age of eagles in areas most severely affected by persecution. In most simulations where a persecution-free estimate of territory-occupancy turnover rate was used, the model predicted that the population would increase by up to 500 occupied territories, the upper limit set in the model .

British raptor populations began to recover during the twentieth century after a long period of decline. This recovery, in which protective legislation and a reduction in the prevalence of game hunting played an important part, was welcomed by all those who enjoy seeing our native top predators soaring overhead. The majority of birdwatchers may, however, be unaware of the serious impact persecution is still having on species such as the Golden Eagle. Using scientifically rigorous methods, this paper shows that the cessation of persecution should be the top priority for Golden Eagle conservation in Scotland. A fascinating discussion also suggests that further research could prove whether overall grouse numbers may actually benefit from the presence of Golden Eagles, owing to the low direct impact of the eagles and their suppression of smaller raptors.

Whitfield, P. P., Fielding, A. H., Mcleod, D. R. A., & Haworth, P. F. 2004. Modelling the effects of persecution on the population dynamics of Golden Eagles in Scotland. *Biol. Conserv.* 119: 319-333.

News and comment

Compiled by Adrian Pitches

Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of *British Birds*

The Corn Crake returns to England

The decline of the Corn Crake *Crex crex* is a familiar, if depressing, story. Mechanical mowing and the early harvesting of crops, before the end of the breeding season, have had a catastrophic effect on Corn Crakes in Britain and across much of western Europe. The Corn Crake has been listed as 'Globally Threatened', although recent and more optimistic assessments of the large population in Russia mean that it is now regarded as 'Near Threatened' in *Threatened Birds of the World 2004.*

By the latter part of the twentieth century, breeding Corn Crakes in Britain were restricted almost exclusively to the far northwest, and chiefly to a population stronghold in the Hebrides, where a recovery project that brings conservationists into partnership with farmers and crofters has enabled numbers to increase. A range of schemes now promote 'Corn Crake-friendly' farming methods, but achieving significant range expansion beyond this core area remains a major challenge.

The UK Biodiversity Action Plan for the Corn Crake, published in 1995, had a long-term aim to re-establish Corn Crakes in parts of their former range in the UK, although the methods by which this might be achieved were still to be developed. The discovery that a bird-keeper in eastern Germany was successfully breeding captive Corn Crakes provided a potential solution. He found that it was possible for captive-bred Corn Crakes to migrate, survive the winter and return as adults to nearby grassland. English Nature and the RSPB thus came up with a joint plan to breed Corn Crakes in captivity, and release them on the Nene Washes, near Peterborough. Here, both organisations are working with local farmers to manage several hundred hectares of grassland for birds and other wildlife. From the outset, it was clear that it would be necessary to release relatively large numbers of juveniles, since natural mortality during the winter and on migration is high.

The Zoological Society of London was brought in as a project partner and, in February 2001, 15 young captive-bred Corn Crakes were imported from Germany. They were quarantined and spent the spring at an indoor facility at Chester Zoo before being transferred to purpose-built outdoor pens at Whipsnade Wild Animal Park in June. Disappointingly, no breeding took place that summer but in autumn they were moved to a communal heated indoor enclosure for the winter, with access to an outdoor run.

In April 2002, the birds were moved back into individual outdoor pens, where the first males soon began calling vigorously. Mating and nest-building occurred within a few days and egg-laying began in mid May. Unfortunately, a Weasel *Mustela nivalis* found its way into the breeding enclosure and killed a number of chicks and adults before being discovered. Only ten chicks were reared successfully; four were kept at Whipsnade for breeding, with the remaining six transferred to pens at the Nene Washes at around 10-14 days old. At five weeks old they were given health checks before being released into the wild, full-grown and able to fly strongly. The hope was that these juveniles would migrate as normal to winter quarters in Africa, and that some would survive to return to the Nene Washes the following spring.

No calling males were heard on the reserve in spring 2003, although, given the small number of birds released and low natural survival rates, this was not unexpected. In April, however, calling began again at Whipsnade as the captive birds (including a new consignment from Germany) came into breeding condition and, during the summer, well over 100 eggs were laid. By the end of August 2003 a total of 52 juveniles had been released on the Nene Washes.

The 2004 breeding season got off to an early start, with captive males beginning to call in late

RSPB Images

320. The Nene Washes in Cambridgeshire are being managed for a wide variety of birds, including the Corn Crake *Crex crex*.

March and the first chicks hatching at Whipsnade before the end of May. On the Nene Washes, in order to try to attract migrating birds to the site, two calling males from Whipsnade were held in pens on the reserve. Reserve staff and local birdwatchers listened out for returning Corn Crakes but were disappointed. However, the season took an unexpected turn, as Charlie Kitchin, RSPB Senior Warden, explains:

'On 18th August, I was driving along a section of river bank near the release pens when a Corn Crake walked out ahead of me. I stopped to look but the bird flew on and I assumed that this was a recently released bird, even though it was a kilometre or so from the nearest release site. Turning the tractor around, I noticed two other Corn Crakes walking away from me, giving excellent views; one was definitely not ringed (confirming that it was not one of the young birds released from captivity) and the other probably not. After 50 m they ran out of cover and turned back towards me, stopping about 6 m from the stationary tractor. One bird was bold enough to fly around me; the second eventually walked under the tractor. Both were juveniles, full-winged and able to fly, and the first bird was probably also part of this group of independent juveniles.

'Two months earlier, on 18th June, we had seen a bird outside the release pens and assumed that it was a female attracted to the captive calling male. The project partners discussed the best course of action and decided that we had a great chance to achieve successful breeding by releasing the male bird. He was known from veterinary checks to be healthy, he had been catching live food for himself, and he had been kept out of regular contact with people, so it was felt that he had a good chance of living and breeding in the wild. It is likely that these three juveniles are their offspring. We do not know if the adult female was a bird released in 2003 or was a genuinely wild bird, but either way this event has made a valuable contribution to the project.'

The original plan was to release at least 100 birds each year at the Nene Washes for three years. We are still some way from achieving this target (though over 70 were released in 2004), but on-going refinements to the breeding techniques may allow a further increase in the numbers of chicks reared, and the partners are keen to continue with the project. The first successful breeding of Corn Crakes on the Nene Washes for over 50 years is an exciting sign that the project is succeeding, though we are, of course, still some way from establishing a breeding population. The return of more released birds to the Nene Washes in spring 2005 will be an important next step in achieving that aim.

Contributed by Peter Newbery (RSPB), Charlie Kitchin (RSPB), Phil Grice (English Nature) and John Ellis (Zoological Society of London)

RSPB Images

321. To avoid aggression during the captive breeding programme, male and female Corn Crakes *Crex crex* are kept together only until the clutch is part-laid .

RSPB Images

322. Corn Crake *Crex crex* chicks are hatched in incubators at Whipsnade Wild Animal Park and hand-fed for a few days (these chicks are ten days old) until they can feed themselves.

New species of rail

Never mind the Olympics, or the antics of Premiership footballers, this was the news story that raced around the world in August. Clearly, what the world's media wanted was a flightless moorhen – the newly discovered Calayan Rail *Gallirallus calayanensis.* Following BirdLife's announcement of the discovery, on the Babuyan Islands in the northern Philippines, there was feverish media interest from Europe, Asia and beyond.

Like its closest relative, the Okinawa Rail *G. okinawae* from Okinawa Island (1,000 km to the north, in the Ryukyu Islands, Japan), the new species appears to be almost flightless, and the two species closely resemble one another in terms of size and structure. The Anglo-Filipino Babuyan Islands Expedition was led jointly by Carl Oliveros and Genevieve Broad, who had both previously worked on a WWF project to conserve Humpback Whales *Megaptera novaeangliae* in the waters around the island. They had the support of the Mayor of Calayan, who wants the island and its surrounding waters to be made a protected area.

Just before noon on 11th May 2004, a young member of the team, Carmella Española, was walking through a clearing and heard unfamiliar calls, which drew her attention to a group of four rails in the undergrowth. Shortly afterwards, she watched two birds cross the trail and begin feeding. They were entirely dark, with orange-red bill and legs, and appeared to be the same size as Barred Rail *G. torquatus*, a common species on the island. Carmella took notes and photographs, and recorded the calls. But her account of the sighting had Des Allen, an expedition member and expert on Oriental birds, completely stumped. Next day he went to the same area, when playback of Carmella's recording attracted a rail to within 2 m of where he stood. From the uniform dark plumage, red legs and medium-length red bill, Des realised that this was something unknown. Over subsequent days, the team observed the birds many times; in fact, the number of sightings indicated that the rail was quite common in the area. Discussions with local people established that the rail was well known to them, and had a local name of 'piding'. A full write-up of the rail's discovery can be found in Vol. 20 of the Oriental Bird Club (OBC) journal *Forktail.*

Links: BirdLife press release (www.birdlife.org/news/pr/2004/08/calayan_rail.html); Oriental Bird Club (www.orientalbirdclub.org).

Birding Asia

A brief mention for the OBC's other publication, its revamped bulletin. The first issue of *Birding Asia* was published in the summer and marks a huge step forward for the former OBC *Bulletin*, particularly in photographic reproduction. Many excellent new features include: an identification section (frigatebirds *Fregata* in this issue); profiles of Oriental ornithologists; and little-known birding locations in Asia. Membership of the OBC costs £15.00, which secures two of these lavish magazines each year together with the annual volume of *Forktail.* OBC supports the conservation of the threatened birds of Asia by providing research grants, primarily for projects run by Oriental nationals in the field.

Hotfoot to the Redfoot

The Calayan Rail was not the only international bird story hogging the headlines during August. In the USA, where the Presidential election is in full swing, the urgent need for respite from the politicians meant that there were plenty of column inches devoted to another dark bird with red bill and legs: North America's first Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus.* The key element for the American audience was its chosen location: the summer playground of film-stars and ex-Presidents, Martha's Vineyard, in Massachusetts. This turned a great bird story into a great people story, and an estimated 10,000 souls, ranging from birders to those just wanting to see what all the fuss was about, twitched the first-summer male during its two-week stay at Katama aerodrome. The bird became such a celebrity in this playground of celebrities that it was made 'Person (Bird) of the Week' on the ABC TV News show *World News Tonight*!

There are several engaging accounts of the falcon's stay by its finder E. Vernon Laux on the *Martha's Vineyard Times* website: 'More unexpected [than the bird itself] was the arrival of people with a casual interest in birds, who had never travelled anywhere to see one before. There really had never been a rare bird prior to this wayward falcon that generated this kind of interest, not only from birders but many others. The excitement crossed over into the lives of people curious about what the birders were seeing and wondering why it mattered.' Just how did this bird – assuming that it was a genuine vagrant – reach the eastern seaboard of the USA from its African wintering grounds? Answers on a postcard to E. Vernon Laux.

Link: *Martha's Vineyard Times* (www.mvtimes.com), with photos at http://massbird.org/sightings/hotbirds/RedFootedFalcon.htm

Eleonora's Falcon gunned down on Malta

Sadly, another rare falcon received a different kind of welcome as Maltese hunters started their annual carnage even before the hunting season began. One of a flock of five Eleonora's Falcons *Falco eleonorae* was shot near Buskett on 22nd August. The global population of Eleonora's Falcon is approximately 3,500 pairs, with an estimated 75% of this total nesting in Greece. It has the highest level of protection under the EU Birds Directive. The entire population, which breeds from the Canary Islands and coastal Morocco east through the Mediterranean basin to Cyprus, migrates eastwards around the Mediterranean and down through the Red Sea and East Africa to winter in Madagascar. This autumn there will be greater monitoring of illegal raptor killing on Malta, as two Swedish birders, supported by BirdLife Malta and funded by the Swedish Ornithological Society, are spending two months on the island. They will compile accurate estimates of the number of raptors shot to convince the Maltese Government and the EU of the need for increased bird protection on the island. Information about migrating raptors and the numbers shot, a diary and pictures are published daily on the website www.sofnet.org/malta04 (in Swedish with an English summary).

Link: BirdLife Malta (www.birdlifemalta.org).

Despatches from Greenland

Hans Meltofte, a researcher for the National Environmental Research Institute, Department of Arctic Environment, Denmark, has sent in the following observations after summer fieldwork at the Zackenberg Research Station in central Northeast Greenland. These may be particularly relevant given the problems that seabirds in the North Sea are facing, as reported in N&c in August and September:

'Here in high-Arctic Greenland, the weather in June in recent years has been exceptionally warm, and temperatures in late May and early June 2002 were the warmest on record. Snow and ice have melted faster during the last three years than we have ever seen before. Waders such as Sanderlings *Calidris alba*, Dunlins *C. alpina* and Turnstones *Arenaria interpres* have laid eggs earlier than ever previously recorded in the region, and likewise several species of plants were found flowering earlier than ever in 2004. The multiyear pack ice drifting south along the coast of northeast Greenland has shrunk considerably, while studies by the Geological Survey of Greenland and Denmark show that the glaciers and ice caps are melting at an alarming rate. In 2004, there was more water in the rivers during July than we have seen before, further indication of rapid glacier melt. Of course, we cannot point to the precise reasons behind climate change, but the fact that it is indeed occurring is extremely clear here in Greenland.'

Dalmatians on the spot

Can you find £3,000? That is the sum that the Romanian Ornithological Society needs to protect Europe's third-largest Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus* colony from further erosion. The work must be completed in the next two months, before winter weather sets in.

The pelicans – forming the largest colony in Romania – nest on a small island on Lake Sinoie, in the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve. Storm damage and continual wave erosion have reduced the island's surface by 60%, and although 84 pairs bred on the island in 2004, a further 70-80 nests were swept away. The total European breeding population of Dalmatian Pelicans numbers fewer than 1,500 pairs and the species has recently been upgraded to 'Vulnerable' following declines across most of its range.

Turkish delta under threat – again

Despite being saved from initial development plans, one of Turkey's most important natural wetland areas now faces a new threat from the proposed construction of an international harbour. Doğa Derneği (BirdLife in Turkey) and EgeDoğa (the Aegean Society for Conservation of Nature) are fighting hard to protect the Gediz Delta from destruction. The delta, close to the city of Izmir on the west coast of Turkey, is a key site for a number of species including Red-breasted Goose *Branta ruficollis*, Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus*, Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* and Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*. The site is a designated Ramsar site – a wetland of international importance – and thus protected by international conservation legislation.

In winter, some 80,000 waterbirds can be found at the site. The Gediz Delta is the only wintering place for Black Storks *Ciconia nigra* in Turkey and is one of only two breeding sites for Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus* in the country, while up to 20,000 flamingos overwinter here too. Most of the flamingo population feeds close to the proposed harbour and their habitat would be completely destroyed if proposals were realised.

Doğa Derneği and EgeDoğa led a successful court case against implementation of initial development plans, saving 8,000 ha of saltmarsh from permanent destruction. Previously, WWF Turkey had also won a court case against development of the southeastern segment of the same area. The site is, however, now under renewed pressure from lobby groups striving to convince the Turkish Ministry of Environment and Forestry to allow the construction of an international harbour. Yet it is not just birds that would benefit from the conservation of the Gediz Delta as a natural area, since there are also significant implications for the local economy too. Salt production and the local fishing industry would both be devastated by development of the harbour.

Colour-ringed Sociable Lapwings

A substantial proportion of the known world population of Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* was colour-ringed in Kazakhstan this summer. Twenty-two adults and 94 chicks were fitted with colour rings in breeding areas east of Lake Tengiz, near Korgalzhin. The birds were each fitted with four coloured plastic rings above the knee joint, which is standard protocol for colour-marked waders. Colours used this year were red (the year marker), light blue, yellow, black, and white. This scheme is part of a new long-term study on this threatened steppe species (see *Brit. Birds* 97: 365), sponsored by BirdLife International. Anyone lucky enough to find a Sociable Lapwing in western Europe (or anywhere else for that matter) should check the bird for colour rings. All sightings, with details of colour combinations, location, date, and the number of individuals observed, should be sent to Dr Will Cresswell, Bute Medical Building, University of St Andrews, Fife KY16 9TS; tel. (01334) 463010; e-mail: will.cresswell@st-andrews.ac.uk

Diary dates 1: Bernard Tucker Memorial Lecture

The annual Bernard Tucker Memorial Lecture, which is organised jointly by the Oxford Ornithological Society and the Ashmolean Natural History Society, will take place on Tuesday 2nd November at the University Museum of Natural History, Parks Road, Oxford, at 8.00 pm. This year, the speaker will be Dr Andrew Gosler, who will give a talk entitled 'Yet even more ways to dress eggs'. This event will again be sponsored by *British Birds*, and the entrance fee is a steal at £2.00. There is no need to book in advance, but any queries should be directed to David Hawkins (tel. 01993 880027).

Tim Loseby

323. Richard Porter receiving the painting from Ian Wallace on behalf of Mike Rogers, Rutland Water, August 2004. Also present are (from left) Pete Clement, Tim Inskipp, Peter Lansdown and Colin Bradshaw.

Thanks, Mike!

As mentioned in the introduction to the 2002 BBRC annual report (*Brit. Birds* 96: 544), 2003 marked the 25th time that Mike Rogers has compiled this report in his role as Honorary Secretary of the Rarities Committee. To mark the occasion, Ian Wallace produced a painting to commemorate this particular landmark (see left). The painting, which depicts four of Mike's favourite stomping grounds (Cley, Norfolk; Beachy Head, Sussex; the West Midlands; and St Agnes, Scilly) in its four corners, plus an eclectic mix of BBRC rarities, was handed over at this year's Birdfair. Receiving the painting on Mike's behalf was Richard Porter, while also present were other past members of the Committee who served under Mike, and the present chairman, Colin Bradshaw.

In his acceptance speech, Richard said: 'Mike is an old Sussex and BBRC colleague, and I'm honoured to receive this painting on his behalf. As Secretary of BBRC he has always maintained the highest of standards, both in the assessment process and in dealing with the hundreds, probably thousands, of observers who submit records. He is always meticulous in searching for the truth of rarity submissions and, in my opinion, this has helped BBRC – and British ornithology – to gain the reputation it has throughout the world for thoroughness and the setting of standards. Many records committees are now following the BBRC example and Mike, you can be proud of that.'

Diary dates 2: BTO conference

The BTO Ringing & Migration Conference welcomes ringers and non-ringers to the Hayes Conference Centre at Swanwick, in Derbyshire, on 3rd-5th December 2004. The main speakers this year will cover subjects as wide-ranging as Corn Crakes *Crex crex*, Slender-billed Curlews *Numenius tenuirostris*, Wood Larks *Lullula arborea*, urban birds, nest recording and 'BirdTrack'. The BTO's Juliet Vickery will focus on ringing studies in Africa, Gabriel Gargallo (co-author of *Sylvia Warblers*) will talk about ringing in Catalunya, while this year's Witherby Lecture will be given by Pat Monaghan. For further details contact BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU; e-mail: jane.waters@bto.org

Channel Islands List

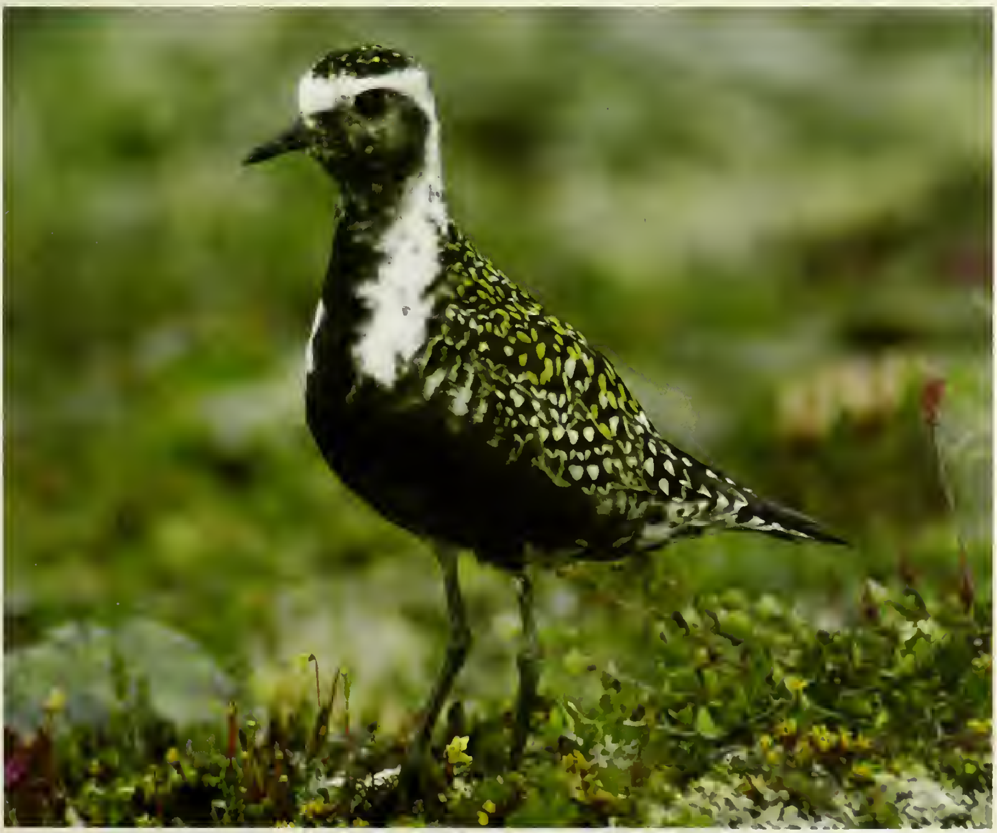
Glyn Young tells us that the updated Channel Islands list, accurate to the end of 2003, is now available on the web, at http://www.jerseybirds.co.uk. The site is well worth a look, and also provides the latest bird news for Jersey. Guernsey's bird news is accessible through http://www.geocities.com/mplawlorgue/Guernseybirdnews.html; this is another excellent website, though note that the checklist has not been updated since 2001.

Editorial changes

Please note that any editorial correspondence should, for the time being, be addressed to *BB*'s main office, in East Sussex, though the usual e-mail address (editor@britishbirds.co.uk) remains current. The editorial office is moving this autumn, and a new address will be confirmed later in the year.

Correction

In the September issue, one of the plates in the paper on field identification of Pacific *Pluvialis fulva* and American Golden Plovers *P. dominica* (*Brit. Birds* 97: 434-443) was inadvertently transposed, as many readers realised. We apologise for the omission of the correct plate 277, and include that below, together with a revised caption. *Eds*



Oscar W. Johnson

324. Female American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica* in full breeding plumage, Seward Peninsula, Alaska, June. As with Pacific Golden Plovers *P. fulva*, females in breeding plumage are more variable than males. The individual shown here is relatively dark, its coloration approaching that of a male, whereas others have the face paler and more blotchy (see *Brit. Birds* 97: plate 276).

Recent reports

Compiled by Barry Nightingale and Anthony McGeehan

This summary of unchecked reports covers mid August to mid September 2004.

Canvasback *Aythya valisineria* Private site (Kent), 15th August. **Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca* Chew Valley Lake (Somerset), 20th August to 1st September.

Zino's/Fea's Petrel *Pterodroma madeira/feae* Northwest of St Mary's (Scilly), 28th August; Bridges of Ross (Co. Clare), 1st September, seen two hours later past Brandon Point (Co. Kerry); 6.5 km west of Scilly, 6th September. **Little Shearwater** *Puffinus assimilis* Ramore Head (Co. Antrim), 25th August; Brandon Point (Co. Kerry), 28th August; Kilcummin (Co. Mayo), 28th August. **Wilson's Storm-petrel** *Oceanites oceanicus* Singles were seen on pelagic trips off Scilly on 9th, 14th, 17th and 24th August and 6th September, with two on 15th August; Newbiggin (Northumberland), 31st August.

Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* Ouse Washes (Cambridgeshire), 10th August; Boscathnoe Reservoir (Cornwall), 2nd-3rd September. **Purple Heron** *Ardea purpurea* Cley/Salthouse (Norfolk), 12th August; perhaps same, Breydon Water (Norfolk), 15th August to 3rd September; Holland Haven (Essex), 6th-7th September. **Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra* A wide-ranging individual was seen at several sites in Essex between 16th August and 1st September, with another one at Pagham Harbour (West Sussex), 7th September.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans* Headon Warren (Isle of Wight), 2nd September; Orcombe Point (Devon), 5th September, presumed same, Seaton (Devon), 5th September; Arne (Dorset), 9th September. **Red-footed Falcon** *Falco vespertinus* Hengistbury Head (Devon), 8th September.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* Pegwell Bay (Kent), 13th-14th August. **Great Knot** *Calidris tenuirostris* Wyre estuary (Lancashire), 16th-17th and 19th August (same individual as seen on 31st July). **Semipalmated Sandpiper** *Calidris pusilla* Tacumshin (Co. Wexford), 4th-8th September. **White-rumped Sandpiper** *Calidris fuscicollis* Slimbridge (Gloucestershire), 15th August; Brue estuary (Somerset), 17th August. **Baird's Sandpiper** *Calidris bairdii* Tresco (Scilly), 30th August to 9th September; Tacumshin, 2nd-8th September; Davidstow (Cornwall), 6th-9th September, possibly same, Crowdy Reservoir (Cornwall), 6th and 9th September; Marazion (Cornwall), 7th-9th September. **Broad-billed Sandpiper** *Limicola falcinellus* Cley/Salthouse, 13th-14th August; perhaps same, Titchwell (Norfolk), 16th-20th August. **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** *Tryngites subruficollis* Blacktoft Sands (East Yorkshire), 29th August to 1st September; Thorganby Ings (North Yorkshire), 4th and 7th-9th September; Ellerton Ings (East Yorkshire), 5th September; Davidstow, two, 6th September, one 8th September; Hickling Broad (Norfolk), 6th-8th September; Lewis (Western Isles), 6th September. **Great Snipe** *Gallinago media* Girdle Ness (Northeast Scotland), 11th August. **Long-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus scolopaceus* Kinsale Marsh (Co. Cork) and Blennerville (Co. Kerry), both present throughout early September. **Terek Sandpiper** *Xenus cinereus* Blennerville, 5th-8th September. **Spotted Sandpiper**

Steve Young

325. Adult Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*, Wyre Estuary, Lancashire, August 2004.

Actitis macularius Saltholme Pools (Cleveland), 11th August.

Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla* Hayle estuary (Cornwall), 24th-25th August. **Franklin's Gull** *Larus pipixcan* Sandbach Flashes (Cheshire), 2nd September. **White-winged Black Tern** *Chlidonias leucopterus* Grafham Water (Cambridgeshire), 9th August; Hornsea Mere (East Yorkshire), 9th-12th August; Stanpit Marsh (Dorset), 10th August; Skinflats Lagoons (Forth), 13th-14th August; Abberton Reservoir (Essex), 17th and 19th August; Instow (Devon), 18th August; Dungeness (Kent), 18th August; Breydon Water, 29th August; Walrow Gravel-pits (Somerset), 29th-31st August; Loch of Tankerness (Orkney), 6th-7th September; QEII Reservoir (Surrey), 6th September.

Purple Martin *Progne subis* Lewis, 5th-6th September. **Red-rumped Swallow** *Hirundo daurica* Great Blasket Island (Co. Kerry), 7th September. **Tawny Pipit** *Anthus campestris* Portland (Dorset), 1st-2nd September; Cape Clear Island (Co. Cork), 3rd September; Flamborough Head (East Yorkshire), 4th September. **Red-throated Pipit** *Anthus cervinus* Davidstow, 30th August; Porthgwarra (Cornwall), 31st August. **Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola* Nanjizal (Cornwall), 22nd August; Skomer (Pembrokeshire), 24th August; Loch of Spiggie (Shetland), 30th August to 6th September; Marazion, 31st August to 8th September; Ballycotton (Co. Cork), 2nd September; Leam Lough (Co. Mayo), 6th September.

Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia* Cruden Bay (Northeast Scotland), 12th August; Spurn (East Yorkshire), 14th August; Sumburgh (Shetland), 25th August. **Aquatic Warbler** *Acrocephalus paludicola* Thorney Island (West Sussex), 11th August; Stanpit Marsh, 12th August; Fair Isle (Shetland), 12th and 16th August (two birds); Titchfield Haven (Hampshire), 13th August; Pool of Virkie (Shetland), 14th August; Quendale (Shetland), 14th August; Christchurch (Dorset), 21st August; Durlston Country Park (Dorset), 23rd August; Kenfig Pool (Glamorgan), 23rd August; Sandwich Bay (Kent), 28th August; Aston Gravel-pits (Derbyshire), 31st August; Abbotsbury (Dorset), 1st September; Soar (Devon), 4th September; Pett Level (East Sussex), 5th September. **Booted Warbler** *Hippolais caligata* Hartlepool (Cleveland), 10th August; Ballycotton, 2nd September; Annagh Head (Co. Mayo), 2nd-6th September. **Subalpine Warbler** *Sylvia cantillans* Quendale, 11th August. **Greenish Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochiloides* Seventeen arrived during 10th-14th August, at least another 12, probably 16, on 19th-31st August, with four more during 1st-8th September: Cove Bay (Northeast Scotland), 10th-13th August; Gorleston-on-Sea (Norfolk), 11th August; Girdle Ness, two on 11th, one seen intermittently to 26th August; Fishtown of Usan (Angus/Dundee), 12th-16th August; Ethie Mains (Angus/Dundee), 12th August; Balmedie Country Park (Northeast Scotland), 12th August; Geosetter (Shetland), 12th August; Lunan Bay (Angus), 13th August; Burnmouth (Borders), 13th August; Kingsbarns (Fife), 13th August; Thortonloch (Lothian), 13th August;

Robin Chittenden

326. Juvenile Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus* (left) Titchwell, Norfolk, August 2004.

Yvonne Benting

327. Purple Martin *Progne subis*, Butt of Lewis, Lewis, Western Isles, 5th-6th September 2004; if accepted, this will be the first record for the Western Palearctic.

Roger Riddington

328. Adult female Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*, Loch of Spiggie, Shetland, September 2004.

Roger Riddington

329. Adult Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*, Gulberwick, Shetland, August 2004.

Micky Maher

330. Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola*, Skaw, Unst, Shetland, September 2004.

Bridge of Don (Northeast Scotland), 13th August; Gosford Bay (Lothian), 14th August; Blakeney Point (Norfolk), 14th-17th August; Waxham (Norfolk), 14th August; Farne Islands (Northumberland), 14th and 31st August; Edinburgh (Lothian), 19th August; Cruden Bay, 21st August; North Ronaldsay (Orkney), 23rd August; Fife Ness (Fife), 24th August, with two 25th August; Hauxley (Northumberland), two 24th August, with one to 26th; Holy Island (Northumberland), 24th August; Flamborough Head, 28th August, another, 1st September; Spurn, two, 30th August; Fairburn Ings (West Yorkshire), 30th August; St Mary's, 4th-5th September; Bressay (Shetland), 6th September; Holme (Norfolk), 8th September. **Arctic Warbler** *Phylloscopus borealis* Auskerry (Orkney), 15th August; Unst (Shetland), 6th September; Bempton (East Yorkshire), 8th September. **Western Bonelli's Warbler** *Phylloscopus bonelli* Bempton, 30th-31st August.

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor* Gulberwick (Shetland), 17th-30th August; South Ronaldsay (Orkney), 20th-23rd August. **Woodchat Shrike** *Lanius senator* Polgigga (Cornwall), 2nd-5th September; Lundy (Devon), 2nd-4th September. **Red-eyed Vireo** *Vireo olivaceus* Cape Clear Island, 5th September. **Yellow-breasted Bunting** *Emberiza aureola* Unst, two, 5th-6th September, one to 7th September. **Black-headed Bunting** *Emberiza melanocephala* Farne Islands, 23rd August.

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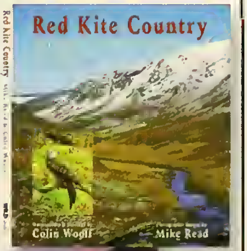

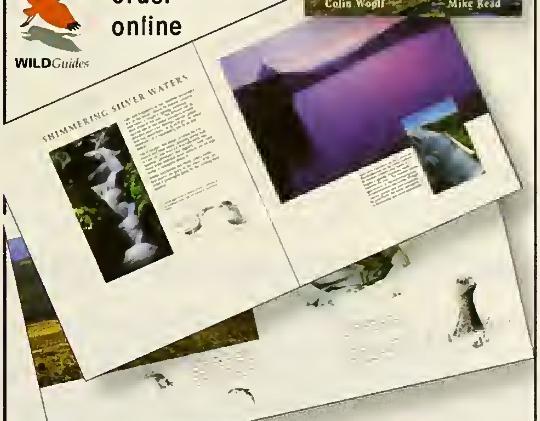

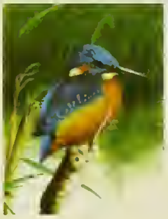

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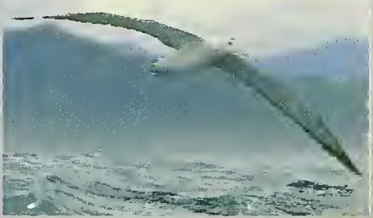

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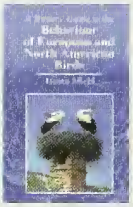

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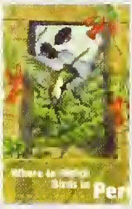

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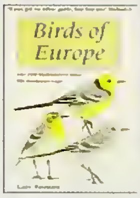

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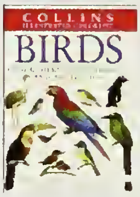

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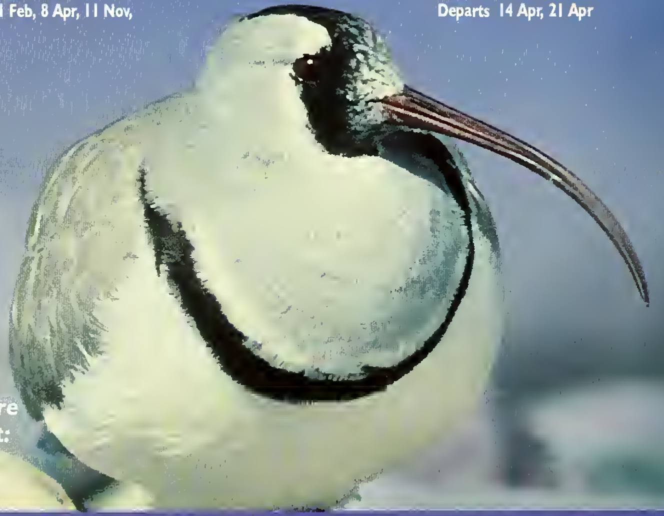

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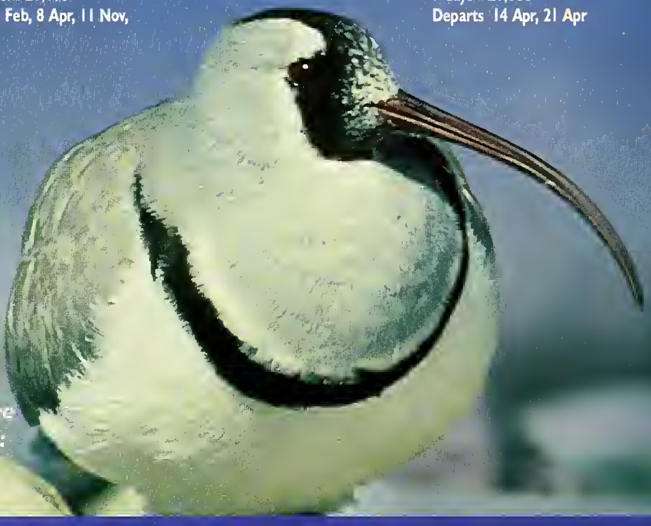

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558 Report on rare birds in Great Britain in 2003
M. J. Rogers and the Rarities Committee

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Report on rare birds in Great Britain in 2003

M. J. Rogers and the Rarities Committee

This is the forty-sixth annual report of the British Birds Rarities Committee and it provides details of accepted records of rare birds in Britain in 2003, with some additional, outstanding records from earlier years. On average, we process about 1,000 records each year, but we believe that there are about 100 (11%) good records from 2003 which have yet to be submitted for scrutiny. This is an increase on previous years, when our estimate of the shortfall has been approximately 5-8%. BBRC is not alone in experiencing this difficulty and a similar failure to submit records is apparent at a county level as well. Sometimes, for BBRC at least, this simply reflects the administrative problems of collating paperwork from a growing number of observers – for example, we received a set of about 20 outstanding 2003 records from one county in late summer 2004 but, unfortunately, it was impossible to get these assessed in time to go into this report. Nevertheless, as part of the process of modernising the way in which BBRC operates, we are exploring ways of simplifying record submission. Over the last 12 months, almost 20% of submissions were received by e-mail and we would hope to receive more than 50% of all records electronically by 2006. During the coming year, we will focus in particular on simplifying the assessment process for birds which have been photographed, so that images with a small amount of supporting evidence can be uploaded with a minimum of fuss, thereby streamlining both the submission and assessment process. One of the great strengths of BBRC is that, from its inception, it has employed a robust system for documenting and archiving the various stages of assessment and decision-making. Full records are maintained in a way that has stood the test of time and permitted full reviews of the Committee's decisions, years after the event. To continue this tradition, we must establish a reliable, secure and efficient system of archiving digital photographs so that future generations, who may wish to re-examine certain records, will have no difficulty in finding sufficient information to carry out a proper review. Consequently, we feel that (for example) records which comprise only photographs published on a website, which may itself not exist in years to come, are potentially vulnerable and we will continue to ask observers to submit records to BBRC so that we, at least, can store them appropriately.

The electronic revolution is the latest major development in the recording of rare birds in the last 50-100 years. In the early part of the twentieth century, few records were accepted without a specimen but the development of ringing, in particular that allied to the establishment of bird observatories, allowed biometrics and plumage descriptions to be gathered from trapped live birds. From the late 1960s onwards, modern field birding began to develop, and with it the realisation that, with care, observers can tackle many identification challenges in the field where previously it was assumed that only examination in the hand would suffice. Until recently, for example, we believed that biometrics were essential to identify Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*. However, as observers continue to develop and refine their approach to birding, taking advantage of digital photography in particular, we now feel able to accept records of this species from well-documented field records. Furthermore, there is even a suggestion that some birds, such as Sykes's Warbler *Hippolais rama*, may actually be easier to identify in the field than in the hand, based on an improved awareness of factors such as behaviour, jizz and vocalisations.

As well as having the potential to take bird identification onto another level, digital photography and sound-recording have the power

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to make a significant difference to our assessment of rarities. Ideally, we would prefer to receive 'traditional' detailed written notes as well as photographs, but we are sufficiently realistic to know that this will become increasingly less likely. The simple provision of a photograph is, however, insufficient to establish the basic credentials of any claimed rarity on its own. We do need some simple background data as well as a photo or a sound-recording, including the date(s) of the record, plus that of supporting photographs (readily available with digital images), and confirmation that the image or recording is of the individual claimed. In some cases, a photograph alone may not be sufficient to confirm identification, while in other instances there may be apparent discrepancies in an image that cause alarm bells to ring. The entry for Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* in the following systematic list highlights one such concern, one which in this case proved easy to resolve. This record was in no way intended to deceive BBRC, but we have little doubt that, at some point in the future, a deliberate effort to mislead the Committee will happen, and it is imperative that we develop a sound procedure for placing photos and recordings in the context of the record as a whole.

Moving on to the birds themselves, this report contains details of some simply fantastic records. A major highlight of 2003 was the Black Lark *Melanocorypha yeltoniensis* on Anglesey, but the inclusion of not one but two records of this species (including Britain's first, at Spurn in 1984), will no doubt surprise many readers. Also included here are details of Britain's first Audouin's Gull *Larus audouinii*, Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach* and female Redhead *Aythya americana*, along with the third British records of American Coot *Fulica americana*, Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus* and Savannah Sparrow *Passerculus sandwichensis*. Despite our best efforts to make the report as complete as possible, there are still one or two important records missing – for example, two records of Taiga Flycatcher *Ficedula albicilla* from 2003 still need to complete the double circulation of BBRC and BOURC required for a national 'first'.

RIACT (Racial Identification Among Changing Taxonomy) is the BBRC subcommittee tasked with the responsibility for developing criteria for identifying rare subspecies (or races) in Britain, and has made good progress during the year. The appointment of Chris Kehoe as Secretary to RIACT has been a major factor in this progress, and we look forward to publication of some of the results in *British Birds* shortly. Within the last 12 months, RIACT has established the criteria by which Woodchat Shrikes *Lanius senator* of the race *badius*, Grasshopper Warblers *Locustella naevia* of the race *straminea* and Common Chaffinches *Fringilla coelebs* of the North African forms *africana* and *spodiogenys* can be identified and accepted. There are decisions on more 'Caspian Gulls' *Larus (c.) cachinnans* and a review of spring male Common Stonechats of the Siberian race *S. t. maurus* published here. RIACT continues to work at the coalface of emerging species, and is coping well with the constantly shifting goalposts. One area of ongoing research involves the *Sylvia* warblers, including the eastern races of Lesser Whitethroat *S. curruca* and Common Whitethroat *S. communis*, while criteria for acceptance of the recently split Asian Desert Warbler *S. nana* and African Desert Warbler *S. deserti* are now established. Similarly, the means by which the two subspecies groupings of Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus* can be separated, particularly females and individuals in non-breeding plumage, is still under discussion, and we are also still reviewing the field identification of Western *Phylloscopus bonelli* and Eastern Bonelli's Warblers *P. orientalis* which do not call.

At the end of this report, in the list of records that were not accepted, readers will see that Black Kite *Milvus migrans* is still in a class of its own, even though some would have us believe that it is now a relatively common visitor to Britain. While there seems little doubt that its status is changing, especially with 19 accepted records in 2003, Black Kite remains a genuine rarity and any comments to the contrary are not supported by photographic evidence. Far too many sightings are made either without optical equipment or at such great distance that the level of detail required for an acceptable record is not visible. In contrast, it is pleasing to see that the majority of Gull-billed Tern *Sterna nilotica* records we receive (another problem species in the past) are now extremely well documented.

Finally, many readers will note that the statistics for pre-1958 records have changed for some species in the report, occasionally markedly. These data now follow Keith Naylor's book (Naylor, K. A, 1996, *A Reference Manual of Rare Birds in Great Britain and Ireland*, privately published, Nottingham), with, where appropriate, amendments from County Recorders (in particular, as a result of reviews associated with the publication of new or revised county avifaunas) and the ongoing review of 1950-1958 rarities. The statistics have been prepared for this report by our statistician, Pete Fraser, who would welcome any comments or corrections from counties regarding these totals (e-mail secretary@bbrc.org.uk).

Acknowledgments

We wish to thank all the observers and photographers who sent in details of rarities to BBRC. We are indebted to the network of county and regional recorders and their records committees, who have frequently already seen and commented on the descriptions that we receive. The work they do often goes unacknowledged but is invaluable for BBRC. Their comments provide a detailed local perspective which, even with regional representation, BBRC simply could not provide. In particular, we are most grateful to those recorders who have commented on one or more drafts of this year's report; the finished article is most certainly the better for their input. We would like to thank Ned Brinkley, Nils van Duivendijk, Dick Forsman, Martin Garner, Nial Moores, Daniele Occhiato, Dennis Paulson, Ron Pittaway, Lars Svensson, Alf Tore Mjøs, Keith Vinicombe and Grahame Walbridge for their input on difficult records this year. Last but by no means least, we continue to be enormously grateful to Carl Zeiss Ltd for their continued sponsorship of the Committee's work.

Colin Bradshaw

Systematic list of accepted records

The principles and procedures followed in considering records were explained in the 1958 report (*Brit. Birds* 53: 155-158). The following points show the basis on which the list has been compiled:

1. The details included for each record are (1) county; (2) locality; (3) number of birds if more than one, and age and sex if known (in the case of spring and summer records, however, the age is normally given only where the bird concerned was not in adult plumage); (4) if sound-recorded or photographed/video-recorded (and this evidence assessed by the Committee); (5) if trapped or found dead and where specimen is stored, if known; (6) dates(s); and (7) observer(s), in alphabetical order.
2. In general, this report is confined to records which are regarded as certain, and 'probables' are not included. In cases of the very similar Eastern *Phylloscopus orientalis* and Western Bonelli's Warblers *P. bonelli*, however, we publish indeterminate records, and this also applies to those of frigatebirds *Fregata*, the 'soft-plumaged petrel' *Pterodroma mollis/feae/madeira* complex and Booted *Hippolais caligata* and Sykes's Warblers *H. rama* (see also *Brit. Birds* 94: 395).
3. The sequence of species, English names and scientific nomenclature follow the *'British Birds' List of Birds of the Western Palearctic* (1997), but adopt the modifications set out in *Brit. Birds* 97: 2-5 and 110.
4. The three numbers in parentheses after each species name refer specifically to the total number of individuals recorded (i) in Britain & Ireland to the end of 1957, (ii) in Britain only for the period since the formation of the Rarities Committee in 1958, but excluding (iii) those listed here for the current year. The decision as to how many individuals were involved is often difficult, but a consensus view is represented by 'possibly the same' (counted as different in the totals), 'probably the same' (counted as the same in the totals), or 'the same' when evidence is certain or overwhelming. An identical approach is applied to records of a particular species recurring at the same, or a nearby, locality after a lapse of time. In considering claims of more than one individual at the same or adjacent localities, the Committee requires firm evidence before more than one is accepted.
5. The breeding and wintering ranges are given in parentheses for each species.

Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus* (41, 89, 1)

Gloucestershire Slimbridge, first-winter, 16th-28th February, photo (M. J. McGill *et al.*).

This is the first since the winter of 1997/98 at this customary hotspot for the species (*Brit. Birds* 92: 561). Slimbridge accounts for around half of all British records of Lesser White-fronted Goose and, because of this pedigree, birds here are probably the least likely to be regarded as suspect, despite the proximity of an extensive wildfowl collection. Even though Slimbridge is situated on the west coast, the White-fronted Geese *A. albifrons* that winter there are of the European race *albifrons* and it is flocks of this race which are most likely to carry a Lesser White-front of natural origin.

(Rare and declining throughout entire breeding range from N Scandinavia to NE Siberia. Reintroduction scheme in Swedish Lapland boosts numbers wintering in The Netherlands. Migratory, wintering in scattered groups in Netherlands, Hungary, S Black and Caspian Sea areas, N Kazakhstan and Yangtse valley, China.)

Brent Goose *Branta bernicla*

North American and E Siberian race *B. b. nigricans*, 'Black Brant' (1, 138, 8)

Dorset Moonfleet, 19th-20th and 26th October (J. Lidster, B. Spencer); same, Ferrybridge, 1st-2nd November, photo (M. Cade, J. A. Lucas, J. P. Martin *et al.*).

Essex Hamford Water, 5th January to 7th February (S. Cox, J. Novorol); same as Holland Haven, 14th December 2002 (*Brit. Birds* 96: 554). River Crouch, South Woodham Ferrers, 4th January to 17th February (A. W. Shearring, D. Wood); same, 30th November to 2004 (A. W. Shearring); same as 2002 Essex below. Blackwater Estuary and Old Hall Marshes, since 2002 (*Brit. Birds* 96: 554), to 23rd March (D. L. Acfield, J. T. Smith *et al.*); same, Steeple, 7th March (D. Wood). One or other returned Old Hall Marshes, 6th November; three present 9th November, two of same to 2004 (C. J. Tyas *et al.*); one or other, Northey Island, 27th December (J. Buchanan); two of same, Heybridge Gravel-pits, 28th December (D. Rhymes).

Gower Wernffrwd, 26th November to 8th March 2004, photo (B. Stewart *et al.*).

Hampshire Farlington Marshes and Langstone Harbour, 1st February to 30th April, photo (J. Crook).

Lincolnshire Gibraltar Point, 12th January to 6th March, photo (D. E. Balmer, D. Waller, K. M. Wilson *et al.*); 18th December, photo (A. Sims, P. M. Troake, K. M. Wilson *et al.*).

Norfolk Admiralty Point, near King's Lynn, 15th February, 1st March (C. A. Holt); presumed same as Terrington Marsh, 3rd February 2002 (*Brit. Birds* 96: 555). Ousemouth, two, 16th March (C. A. Holt *et al.*); presumed same as Terrington Marsh, 3rd February 2002 (*Brit. Birds* 96: 555). Terrington Marsh, 2nd February (D. E. Balmer, S. J. Holloway, P. M. Wilson); presumed same, 4th December (C. A. Holt, S. J. Turner); presumed returning individual of 2002 (*Brit. Birds* 96: 555). Titchwell, see 2002 Norfolk below. Snettisham, 24th-25th April (B. Stretch).

Suffolk Kingsfleet and Falkenham Marshes, since 2002 to 3rd January (*Brit. Birds* 96: 555); probably same as Falkenham, 8th, 26th December 2000 (*Brit. Birds* 94: 460), Trimley, 21st February 2002 and King's Fleet, 21st December 2002 (*Brit. Birds* 96: 555). Shotley and Trimley Marshes, since 2002, intermittently to 27th March (N. C. Crouch, N. Odin *et al.*), considered different from Kingsfleet/Falkenham, 21st December 2002 to 3rd January 2003 (above). See also 2002 Suffolk below.

Sussex, West Thorney Island, 16th-26th January (C. B. Collins); same as Thorney, Pilsey Islands, 11th-31st December 2002 (*Brit. Birds* 96: 555).

2000 Lincolnshire Humberstone, 10th November (S. D. Wellock); same as Cleethorpes area, 9th November 2000 to at least January 2001 (*Brit. Birds* 94: 460).

2001 Essex Blackwater Estuary, 24th November to at least 30th December (D. Rhymes *et al.*).

2001 Hampshire Needs Ore area, 2nd to at least 31st December (*Brit. Birds* 95: 484) and Beaulieu Estuary, 2nd December (*Brit. Birds* 95: 484), were same individual and present to 29th March 2002. Pennington and Keyhaven Marshes area, 25th November to 2002 (*Brit. Birds* 95: 484), present to 22nd March 2002. Keyhaven, 16th December to 22nd March 2002 (*Brit. Birds* 96: 555), present to 24th March. Hurst Beach, 27th December to 2002 (*Brit. Birds* 95: 484), present to 29th March 2002 and same as Keyhaven above. Cams Bay, Fareham, 29th December (*Brit. Birds* 96: 555), present Portsmouth Harbour, 11th December to 7th March 2002 and not same as Weston Shore, 25th-26th February 2002 (*Brit. Birds* 96: 554).

2001 Lincolnshire Gibraltar Point, 20th-21st February, two 21st (S. Evans, A. Mills, K. M. Wilson).

2001 Suffolk Shotley Marshes, Stour Estuary, 29th March (*Brit. Birds* 96: 555) now considered same as

Trimley Marshes, 18th January (*Brit. Birds* 95: 484) (per N. Odin).

2002 **Essex** Goldhanger, River Blackwater, two, 13th January (*Brit. Birds* 96: 554); should have read one only (per H. Vaughan). River Thames, Leigh-on-Sea, 1st-29th October; same, South Woodham Ferrers, 11th November to 27th December (A. W. Shearring, D. Wood).

2002 **Hampshire** Milford-on-Sea, 7th October, photo (M. P. Moody). See also 2001 Hampshire above.

2002 **Lincolnshire** Gibraltar Point, 7th January to at least 14th February, photo (K. M. Wilson *et al.*). Witham Mouth and Frieston Shore, 3rd February, 3rd March (J. Badley, L. James, S. Keightley). Holbeach Marsh, 26th October, photo (P. Todd).

2002 **Norfolk** Titchwell, two, 3rd November to 22nd March 2003 (J. A. Rowlands *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 188).

2002 **Suffolk** Shotley and Trimley Marshes, 24th December, intermittently to 27th March 2003 (N. Crouch, N. Odin *et al.*).

(Expanding W in Arctic NE Siberia to Lena delta, where overlaps with nominate race. Majority breed in Arctic Alaska and E to Victoria Island, Canada. Migratory, wintering on Pacific coast of North America, S to Baja California. Formerly, large numbers wintered in N China, Korean Peninsula and Japan, but now rare.)

Red-breasted Goose *Branta ruficollis* (14, 55, 0)

Argyll Loch Gruinart, Islay, adult, 18th October 2002 to 9th April, same 10th November to at least 28th March 2004 (A. W. Reid *et al.*); presumed returning individual of 2002 (*Brit. Birds* 96: 555).

1970 **Essex** Potton Island, adult, shot, 29th December, specimen now at Colchester Museum, photo (P. Philpot per N. C. Green).

(Breeds Taimyr Peninsula, Siberia. Migrates SW to winter in coastal regions of W Black Sea in Romania and Bulgaria. Small numbers regularly winter in Netherlands, Greece, Turkey. Some may still use former wintering areas along Caspian Sea.)

American Wigeon *Anas americana* (28, 336, –)

2001 **Clwyd** River Clwyd, ♂, 14th December (S. Morris); presumed same as Caernarfonshire, 2000 (*Brit. Birds* 94: 461).

This species was removed from the list of species considered on 31st December 2001.

(Breeds C Alaska E across cool temperate Canada to Hudson Bay and Quebec, and S into NW and mid-west USA. Winters throughout USA and Central America S to Colombia.)

Black Duck *Anas rubripes* (0, 26, 1)

Steve Young/Birdwatch

331. Male Black Duck *Anas rubripes*, Tresco, Scilly, October 2003.

Cornwall Colliford Reservoir, ♂, 9th-22nd July, 12th August, 15th September; presumed same, Crowdy Reservoir, 23rd August (S. M. Christophers *et al.*); presumed same as 2002 (*Brit. Birds* 96: 556). Loe Pool, ♂, 9th January (E. H. Thomas), returned 23rd September, again 6th-12th December (per K. A. Wilson); presumed same as 2002 (*Brit. Birds* 96: 556).
Scilly Tresco, St Mary's and St Martin's, ♂, since 26th December 2002 to at least 8th November, photo (*Brit. Birds* 96: 556, plate 310; 97: plate 331).
Shetland Dales Voe, ♂, 18th January to 24th February (B. H. Thomason *et al.*).
2002 Cornwall Colliford Reservoir, ♂, 19th January to 5th August (*Brit. Birds* 96: 556); dates should read, 19th, 31st January, 19th April, 4th-15th July, 5th August (S. M. Christophers); same, Garrow Tor, 19th June.
2002 Shetland Loch of Hillwell, ♂, 13th-25th May (G. J. Fitchett *et al.*).

(Breeds E North America from Labrador S to North Carolina and W to Manitoba. Most are resident or dispersive but N breeders migrate to winter in coastal SE USA.)

Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors* (13, 209, 4)

Avon Chew Valley Lake, ♀, 12th-30th September, photo (R. M. Andrews, G. Jones *et al.*).
Leicestershire Rutland Water, ♂, 22nd September to 4th October, photo (M. G. Berriman, S. M. Lister *et al.*).
Sussex, East Icklesham, ♂, 18th June (R. K. Haggar, R. E. Smith *et al.*), present 14th June to mid July.
Sussex, West Goring Gap, ♂, 7th May, photo (C. W. Melgar *et al.*).
2002 Wiltshire Cotswold Water Park, ♂, 3rd August, 25th August to 26th September (N. P. Adams, K. J. Grearson *et al.*).

(Breeds from S Alaska, across much of temperate Canada to south-central USA. Migratory, wintering in S USA, Mexico, Caribbean and N South America.)

Canvasback *Aythya valisineria* (0, 6, 0)

1997 Essex Abberton Reservoir, ♂, 23rd-24th, 30th November (*Brit. Birds* 92: 566), also Ardleigh Reservoir, 29th (A. J. A. Dally).

(Breeds from C Alaska S through W Canada to NE California, and E to C USA. Winters from British Columbia to Great Lakes, and S throughout USA to C Mexico.)

Redhead *Aythya americana* (0, 2, 1)

Glamorgan Kenfig Pool, ♂, since 21st September 2002 to 31st January (*Brit. Birds* 96: 557); same, Cosmeston Lakes, 6th-16th February; same, Lisvane Reservoir, 16th-23rd February; returned to Kenfig 29th October to 14th November (per S. J. Moon).
Outer Hebrides Loch Tangasdale, Barra, first-winter ♀, 20th September to 15th April 2004 (K. Gillon, S. L. Rivers, C. Scott *et al.* per M. S. Scott).

The drake in South Wales returned for its third winter. More remarkably, the female on Barra was found during a purple patch for rarities on this previously little-watched Hebridean island. The identification of female Redhead and the problem of Redhead-like hybrids was covered briefly but effectively by Keith Vinicombe and the late Laurel Tucker in *The Macmillan Field Guide to Bird Identification* (Macmillan, 1989), seven years before the first male was recorded in Britain. More details of the Barra bird can be found in *Birding World* 17: 59, where Martin Scott's videograb shows the bill- and head-shape, and Ring-necked Duck-like pale spectacles and loral area. The typical bill pattern, a duller version of the male's, is also visible in the image, which was taken in February 2004. This was not apparent when the bird arrived in September, a time of year when the identification of female and immature *Aythya* ducks can be even more difficult than usual because important bill patterns may be obscured.

(Patchy breeding distribution in S Alaska and prairie provinces of W Canada and USA. Local breeder in NE USA but range expanding along NE seaboard. Winters in warmer regions of S USA, Mexico and Cuba.)

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* (many, 277, 10)

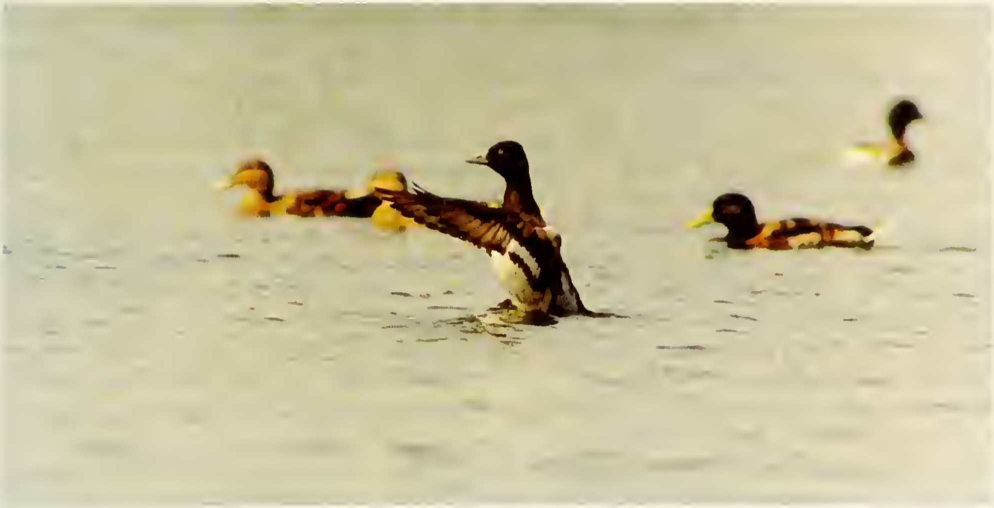
Argyll Loch Bhasapol, Tiree, ♂, 21st-29th April (J. Bowler *et al.*).
Bedfordshire Elstow, ♀, since December 2002 (*Brit. Birds* 96: 557) to 26th February (per D. J. Odell).

Cambridgeshire Paxton Pits NR, ♂, 14th September, photo (J. Lansdell, B. Stretch, S. Webb *et al.*); presumed same as Fen Drayton/Godmanchester, 2000/01 (*Brit. Birds* 96: 558).
Derbyshire Willington Gravel-pits, first-winter, 17th October, photo (J. A. Eaton, R. C. Hutchinson).
Devon Slapton Ley, ♂, 31st October to 8th November, photo (M. Knott *et al.*).
Dorset Morden Park, ♂, since 2002 (*Brit. Birds* 96: 557), to 26th January (per J. Lidster); same, Little Sea, Studland, 4th-6th January (G. Walbridge *et al.*).
Fife Loch Gelly, ♂, 30th July to at least 18th August (D. Ogilvie, K. D. Shaw, J. J. Squire). Also in Perth & Kinross.
Glamorgan Cosmeston Lake, ♂, 20th-31st October (D. R. W. Gilmore *et al.*).
Kent New Hythe Gravel-pits, ♀, 19th December (J. M. Warne).
Leicestershire Eyebrook Reservoir, ♂, 20th September to 12th October (J. B. Bell *et al.*).
Norfolk Welney, ♂, 3rd January (J. B. Kemp); presumed same as November 2002 (*Brit. Birds* 96: 557); same, Welney, 1st-4th November (J. B. Kemp) and Tottenhill Gravel-pits, 14th-17th December (C. Donner). Welney, ♀, 5th-7th December (J. B. Kemp). Lynford Gravel-pits, ♂, 11th-23rd February, 18th-24th April; same, Fowl Mere, 16th February and Stanford Water, 1st March to 11th April (per G. E. Dunmore); presumed returning 2002 individual (see below). Stiffkey Fen, ♀, 23rd June (S. J. Aspinall).
Northamptonshire Daventry Country Park, juvenile/first-winter ♂, since December 2002 to 10th February (*Brit. Birds* 96: 558); same, Hollowell Reservoir, 1st February (A. L. Gillam, M. L. Piper).
Perth & Kinross Vane Farm, Loch Leven, ♂, 1st-16th September (K. D. Shaw *et al.*); same as Fife.
Suffolk Minsmere, ♂, since 2002 (*Brit. Birds* 96: 558) to at least 28th February; presumed same, 3rd November intermittently to 21st March 2004 (R. Drew, D. Fairhurst *et al.*); presumed same, Benacre, 4th November (R. Drew).
Wiltshire Langford Lakes, ♂, 12th-16th March (K. & J. Mortimore, D. E. M. Peart, J. Vickerman *et al.*).
2001 **Hertfordshire** Amwell, ♀, 3rd-4th November, photo (B. Reed *et al.*).
2001 **Lancashire & North Merseyside** Fairhaven Lake and Marton Mere, ♂, 20th October to 2002 (*Brit. Birds* 95: 487), to 8th March 2002 (per S. J. White).
2001 **Norfolk** Fowl Mere, ♂, 1st April (*Brit. Birds* 96: 558), presumed same, 23rd June to 29th July (per G. E. Dunmore).
2002 **Hertfordshire** Wilstone Reservoir, first-winter ♂, 17th-18th November (D. Bilcock *et al.*).
2002 **Lancashire & North Merseyside** See 2001 Lancashire & North Merseyside above.
2002 **Leicestershire & Northamptonshire** Swithland Reservoir, ♂, 5th-15th October (*Brit. Birds* 96: 557), locality is only in Leicestershire.
2002 **Norfolk** Stanford Water, ♂, 16th February, 22nd-31st March, 14th April, and Thompson Water, 13th April (*Brit. Birds* 96: 558); now presumed same as Fowl Mere, intermittently, 5th February to 14th April (*Brit. Birds* 96: 557) and not same as Hickling, 16th March (*Brit. Birds* 96: 558) (per G. E. Dunmore).
2002 **Wiltshire** Ramsbury, ♀, 22nd January to 26th February, photo (K. J. Beint, M. Coller, S. B. Edwards).
2002 **Worcestershire** Grimley Gravel-pits, ♀, 9th-11th, 14th October; same, Westwood Pool, 12th-13th October (T. M. Hinett, S. M. Whitehouse).

(Main breeding range in temperate steppe-forest from Poland and Hungary E through Ukraine to Caspian Sea, but distribution often patchy. Other populations occur in S Spain, Kazakhstan, W Mongolia and Tibetan Plateau. Migratory, most winter in E Mediterranean, Black and Caspian Seas, NE Africa and Indian subcontinent.)

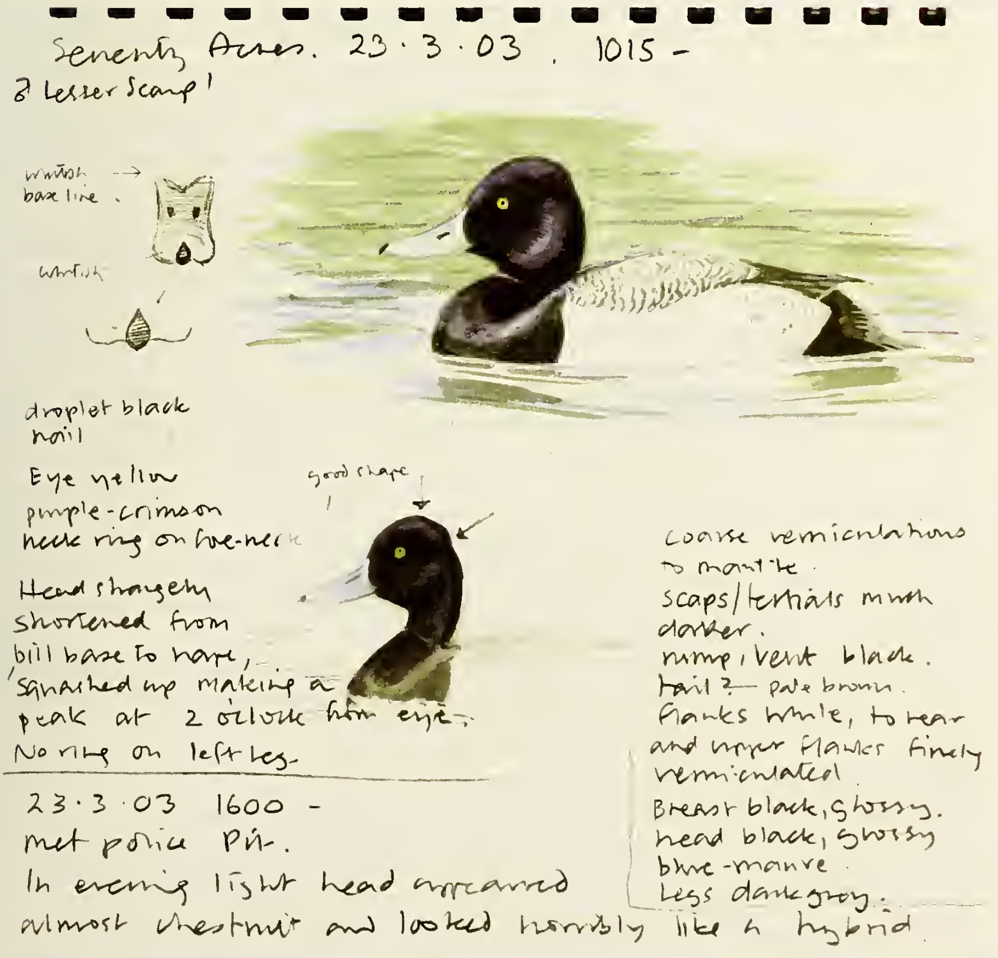
Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis* (0, 54, 13)

Carmarthenshire Penclacwydd, ♂, age uncertain, 4th June, photo (B. & S. Stewart *et al.*).
Cumbria River Eden, Armathwaite, first-winter ♂, 12th-14th January; same, Castle Carrock Reservoir, 16th January; same, Talkin Tarn, 18th January intermittently to 20th February, photo (C. Raven, F. J. Roberts *et al.*); same, Longtown, intermittently 21st to 30th April, 14th May intermittently to 16th June, photo (per C. Raven) (plate 332).
Dorset Little Sea, Studland, ♂, since 14th December 2002 to at least 31st March (*Brit. Birds* 96: 558); returned 15th October to 29th February 2004 (per J. Lidster).



Stef McElwee

332. First-summer male Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*, Longtown, Cumbria, June 2003.



Seventy Acres. 23·3·03 . 1015 -
♂ Lesser Scaup!

droplet black
nail

Eye yellow
purple-crimson
neck ring on lower-neck

Head strangely
shortened from
bill base to nape,
squashed up making a
peak at 2 o'clock from eye.
No ring on left leg.

coarse vermiculations
to mantle.
scaps/tertials much
darker.
rump, vent black.
tail? — pale brown.
flanks white, to rear
and upper flanks finely
vermiculated.
Breast black, glossy.
head black, glossy
blue-mauve.
Legs dark grey.

23·3·03 1600 -
met police PN.
In evening light head appeared
almost chestnut and looked horribly like a hybrid.

Alan Harris

Fig. 1. Male Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*, Seventy Acres Lake, Fishers Green, Essex, March 2003.

Dumfries & Galloway Castle Loch, Lochmaben, ♂, 29th December to 28th January 2004 (A. W. Reid *et al.*).
Durham Bishop Middleham, ♀, 27th March to 23rd April, photo (A. J. Wheeldon *et al.*).
Essex Seventy Acres Lake, Fishers Green, ♂, 23rd-25th March (A. J. Harris *et al.*) (fig. 1).
Greater London Brent Reservoir, first-winter ♂, 14th-23rd February, photo (A. M. Self *et al.*).
Greater Manchester Pennington Flash, ♂, 1st July to 23rd August, photo (A. Disley *et al.*).
Hertfordshire Stocker's Lake, first-winter ♂, 4th January, photo (A. V. Moon *et al.*).
Perth & Kinross Vane Farm, Loch Leven, first-winter ♂, 1st, 11th February (D. Abraham, K. D. Shaw *et al.*). Findatie, Loch Leven, ♂, 16th-20th March (R. Shand, K. D. Shaw, A. Wilson *et al.*).
Yorkshire, East Hornsea Mere, first-winter ♂, 11th January to 1st February, photo (B. Richards *et al.*).
Yorkshire, South Potteric Carr, ♂, 2nd-9th April (S. M. Bird, D. Carroll *et al.*).
Yorkshire, West New Swillington Ings, first-winter ♂, 16th-23rd February, photo (P. R. Morris, M. Pygott *et al.*).
2001 Outer Hebrides Loch an Eilean, South Uist, first-winter ♂, 27th January (P. R. Boyer, B. Rabbitts, A. Stevenson *et al.*).

(Breeds from C Alaska through Canada to Hudson Bay, and S to Washington and South Dakota. Isolated populations E of Great Lakes. Winters along both coastlines of USA, in E from New Jersey to Mexico, W Indies, and C America to N Colombia.)

King Eider *Somateria spectabilis* (75, 107, 5)

Ayrshire Stevenston Point, ♂, 14th June to 6th July, photo (R. Lambie *et al.*).
Clyde Islands Toward, ♂, 25th May (C. M. Waltho); same, Inellan, 21st June (J. T. M. Towill).
Dumfries & Galloway Loch Ryan, ♂, since 3rd October 2002 to at least 27th March (*Brit. Birds* 96: 559); presumed same, 29th December to at least 29th February 2004 (P. N. Collin *et al.*).
Fife Leven, ♀, 3rd-5th May; same, 20th-26th July, 18th, 27th-28th September, 1st, 25th October, 13th-14th December (per D. Ogilvie), same as 2002 (*Brit. Birds* 96: 559). Also in Lothian.
Lothian Aberlady Bay, ♀, 13th-31st May, 15th June (per D. J. Kelly); same as Fife.
Shetland Cat Firth, ♂, 25th October (P. Sclater *et al.*); first-winter ♂, 31st October to 2nd December (S. E. Duffield, P. Sclater *et al.*). Weisdale Voe, first-winter ♂, 1st December (P. V. Harvey, M. Heubeck *et al.*).
2002 Lothian Aberlady Bay, ♀, 20th April to 9th July (per D. Ogilvie); same as 2001 (*Brit. Birds* 95: 489); also in Fife.

(Breeds from Kanin peninsula E across Arctic Siberia, including Novaya Zemlya and W Svalbard, Arctic Alaska, N Canada and N Greenland. European population winters along ice-free coasts of White Sea, N Norway and Iceland. Pacific population winters in Bering Sea.)

Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra*
North American and E Siberian race *americana* (0, 7, 0)

Anglesey Point Lynas, ♂, 31st January (D. Powell); presumed same as Caernarfonshire.
Caernarfonshire Llanfairfechan and Penmaenmawr, ♂, since 2002 to 28th April (*Brit. Birds* 96: 559), returned 28th September to at least 31st December (per J. Barnes).

(Breeds on Siberian tundra from Yana River E to Alaska, and N Canada to Newfoundland. In N Atlantic, winters along coasts of E USA, N to South Carolina, and inland on Great Lakes. Elsewhere, winters in ice-free seas along both coasts of N Pacific Ocean, S to N Japan and California.)

Bufflehead *Bucephala albeola* (2, 7, 0)

2002 Suffolk Great Livermere Lake, ♀, 11th-20th June, 7th-9th July; same, Layham, 22nd-29th September, 8th-9th October, photo (S. E. Newson, J. Oxford, R. M. Thewlis *et al.*).

The inclusion of this individual within this report merely confirms acceptance of its identity by BBRC, but does not endorse its credentials as being of wild origin. In fact, this bird was, at times, remarkably confiding and could be approached to within a few metres.

(Forested regions of North America from C Alaska throughout W and C Canada to Hudson Bay, and S to Montana and NE California. Winters throughout North America from Aleutian Islands and coastal Alaska, S along both seaboards of USA to N Mexico, with small numbers inland.)

White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii* (18, 215, 14)

Argyll Between Iona and Tresnish Isle, adult, 15th May (B. Harrington, R. Johnson, L. Potter *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Butt of Lewis area, five adults, 19th April; two adults (presumed different), one second-summer, 20th (S. Hulka, J. Stirling).

Shetland Foula, adult, 4th May, photo (D. & G. Atherton, A. R. Mainwood). Burra Firth, Unst, adult, 4th May (W. Dickson, S. E. Duffield *et al.*). West Burrafirth, adult, 9th May (S. E. Duffield). Colgrave Sound, Fetlar, first-summer, 30th May (P. R. French, M. Smith). Kirkabister, Nesting, adult, 17th November to at least 26th April 2004 (P. Sclater *et al.*), presumed same as Kirkabister, 19th October to 2003 (*Brit. Birds* 96: 545).

Yorkshire, North Cloughton Wyke, Scarborough, adult, 8th February, photo (D. Bywater *et al.*).

1982 Shetland Bunidale, Mainland, adult, 14th February, now considered same as individual off Whalsay, to 24th March (*Brit. Birds* 76: 478) (*The Birds of Shetland*, 2004).

1993 Shetland Fetlar, age uncertain, 23rd January (*Brit. Birds* 87: 508), now considered same as Fetlar, adult, 28th December 1992 (*Brit. Birds* 86: 452) (*The Birds of Shetland*, 2004).

2001 Orkney See 2002 Orkney below.

2002 Orkney North Ronaldsay, adult, 25th-28th April (*Brit. Birds* 96: 545), was in 2001.

2002 Shetland Bluemull Sound, adult, 6th-7th, 14th November (B. H. Thomason *et al.*). Kirkabister, Nesting, 19th October to 1st January 2003 (*Brit. Birds* 96: 545), now considered to be a new individual (*The Birds of Shetland*, 2004).

White-billed Diver is a scarce bird, even within its rather restricted European range. In 1995, Folvik & Mjøs described a small but regular northward spring passage off the coast of southwest Norway, at about the same latitude as Shetland, in late April and May (*Brit. Birds* 88: 125-129). They estimated that the passage involved up to 100 individuals each year and postulated that these birds may winter well offshore in the North Sea, or possibly in sea areas farther west and south. Rogers (*Brit. Birds* 90: 292-293) supported this hypothesis, noting the evidence of a marked spring bias to British records, with the timing similar to those seen off Norway.

A clear pattern in British records of White-billed Diver has since emerged, with most records falling into one of three distinct categories. The first category is that of occasional wintering birds. These are fairly regular in the Northern Isles, with isolated records farther south in most years, as far south as the English Channel. Approximately half of all records prior to 1975 were of dead or moribund birds in the winter months, from all around the British coast. Subsequently, most have been seen alive and, in 2003, the wintering birds were in Yorkshire and Shetland. The second category is the smallest and refers to a cluster of passage birds which occur between late August and mid October. Most of these turn up along the east coast, between Northeast Scotland and Norfolk, although there is a recent record from Wales during this period. The numbers involved are small, and most birds are recorded flying past during seawatches, typically during periods with a northerly airstream, although occasionally one may linger in an area for a few days. The timing, location and direction of travel of these birds would fit with a weather-induced displacement of active, southbound migrants from the western population into the North Sea. Moreover, the timing confirms that White-billed Diver is an early autumn migrant, with the majority occurring well before the peak of the small passage of Great Northern Divers *G. immer* along eastern coasts, in November. The third, largest, and most consistent category is that observed by Rogers (1997), of returning spring birds. These now occur annually, chiefly in the Northern and Western Isles, and with a peak in late April or early May.

Against such a background, the occurrence of five together in a remote corner of the Western Isles in spring 2003 may not be quite as surprising as it first appears. Further observations here may provide an even clearer indication of the true status and range of White-billed Diver in Britain. Scattered over a huge area at extremely low density, often well offshore in choppy seas, and usually in areas with few observers, a few tens of birds may easily evade detection off the more remote coasts of Scotland, and probably elsewhere in Britain, particularly in winter. This pattern would closely resemble that apparent on the Pacific coast of North America, where small numbers of White-billed Divers winter south to southern British Columbia and the Pacific Northwest, with occasional birds as far south as California.

(In W Palearctic, rare and sporadic breeder along Arctic coasts of European Russia, E from Yamal peninsula and Novaya Zemlya. Also breeds in coastal regions of Siberia, N Alaska and Canada E to Mackenzie River and Baffin Island. Winters at sea, in E Atlantic, S to S Norway, but distribution poorly known.)

Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche melanophris* (3, 18, 0)

2002 **Norfolk** Mundesley, 31st December (M. Fiszer).

A winter record of Black-browed Albatross is unusual but there have been similar records before: one was seen off Durlston Head, Dorset, on 4th February 1980 (*Brit. Birds* 74: 455), while the long-stayer at Bass Rock, Lothian, was noted off Eyemouth, Borders, on 7th or 8th February 1968 and off St Abbs Head, Borders, on 28th February 1969 (*Brit. Birds* 62: 460, 63: 269). Another long-stayer, the one at Hermaness, Unst, Shetland, from the early 1970s until 1995, would frequently arrive back at the gannetry in early March and it seems unlikely that this individual ever left European waters.

(Breeds on islands in S South Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Outside the breeding season, disperses N throughout southern oceans as far as Tropic of Capricorn.)

Zino's/Fea's Petrel *Pterodroma madeira/feae* (0, 31, 1)

Yorkshire, East Flamborough Head, 24th October (P. A. Lassey, I. Marshall, J. Wasse).

1983 **Kent** Dungeness, 15th October (T. P. Inskipp).

2002 **Durham** Whitburn, 23rd September (P. Hogg, W. Moss, B. Unwin); presumed same as Farne Islands, Northumberland, also 23rd (*Brit. Birds* 96: 547).

2002 **Yorkshire,** East Flamborough Head, 26th August (P. A. Lassey, I. Marshall *et al.*); presumed same as Filey Brigg, North Yorkshire, also 26th (*Brit. Birds* 96: 547).

(Zino's Petrel confined to central mountains of Madeira where breeding population is c. 45 pairs; wintering range unknown. Fea's Petrel breeds in Madeira archipelago (Bugio) and Cape Verde Islands. Outside breeding season, disperses throughout N Atlantic.)

Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus* (1, 341, 19)

At sea Sea area Sole: 9 km SE of St Mary's, Scilly, 12th June (R. L. Flood, J. K. Higginson *et al.*); 9 km SE of St Mary's, 30th June (E. A. Fisher *et al.*); 11 km SE of St Mary's, 3rd July (R. L. Flood *et al.*); 10 km S of St Mary's, 12th July, photo (J. K. Higginson *et al.*); 8 km S of St Mary's, 14th July (E. A. Fisher *et al.*); 8 km S of St Mary's, 22nd July, photo (R. L. Flood *et al.*); 8 km S of St Mary's, two, 25th July, one photo (E. A. Fisher, R. L. Flood *et al.*); 14 km S of St Mary's, 26th July (J. Pender *et al.*); 9 km S of St Mary's, 27th July (R. L. Flood *et al.*); 8 km S of St Mary's, two, 8th August (E. A Fisher, B. Lascelles, P. L. Varney *et al.*); 9 km S of St Mary's, two, 10th August (E. A. Fisher, R. L. Flood *et al.*); 12 km SE of St Mary's, two, 13th August (E. A. Fisher, R. L. Flood); 10 km S of St Mary's, 22nd August (J. K. Higginson *et al.*); 10 km W of St Mary's, 26th August (E. A. Fisher, J. K. Higginson); 10 km SE of St Mary's, 28th August (E. A. Fisher, J. Pender *et al.*).

(Breeds on rocky coastlines and offshore islands of Antarctic. Migrates N to winter throughout southern oceans, N to C North Atlantic along E seaboard of North America to Newfoundland, Canada, and Bay of Biscay in W Europe.)

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* (269, 192, 4)

Cornwall Swanpool, Falmouth, first-summer ♂, 26th May to 7th June, photo (G. Cockill, S. F. Elton *et al.*).

Hampshire Barton-on-Sea, ♂, 26th May, photo (C. & J. Tabor) (plate 333).

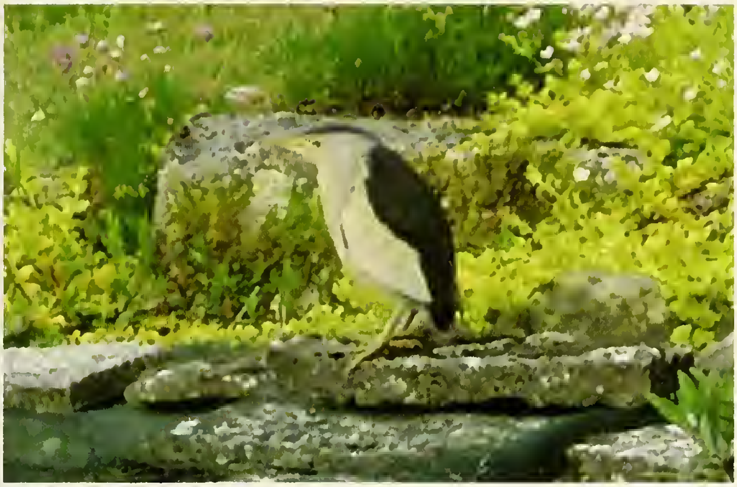
Kent Dungeness, ♂, in song, 11th-18th May, photo (P. G. Akers *et al.*).

Scilly St Agnes, first-summer ♂, 22nd May to 2nd June, photo (M. Hicks, D. Page *et al.*).

Occasionally, we encounter a record that causes more problems than it deserves to. This was certainly the case with the Hampshire Little Bittern record (above), which highlights some of the problems associated with digital photographs and the assessment process. The image which accompanied the record (plate 333) certainly showed a Little Bittern, but the pattern of pixels gave the impression of a two-dimensional bird which had been superimposed onto an unrelated background. Although we had no reason to disbelieve the observers, we asked for the original digital file to be submitted as well. An examination of this convinced us that it was simply an unfortunate photographic effect that was responsible for our concern.

The pattern of occurrence in 2003 is fairly typical. The vast majority of Little Bitterns in Britain are overshooting males which appear on the south coast in May. The singing bird in Kent, and long-staying Cornwall and Scilly birds are a reminder of the pair which bred at Potteric Carr, South Yorkshire, in 1984. Autumn birds are a major rarity, the last one being a juvenile in Surrey on 16th September 1984.

(Widespread, patchy and declining in Europe N to 53°N. To E, breeds to 60°N in Russia, and E to Kazakhstan. W Palearctic population migratory, wintering mainly in E Africa from Sudan and Ethiopia S. Other populations largely resident or dispersive in N Indian subcontinent, sub-Saharan Africa and Australia.)


C. & J. Tabor

333. Male Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*, Barton-on-Sea, Hampshire, May 2003. As described in the text, this record initially caused some concern, when the provenance of the digital photograph appeared in some doubt. Happily, the uncertainties were resolved when the original raw image was provided. While digital cameras may eventually go a long way towards replacing field notebooks as the preferred mode of record-keeping formany birders, it is still the case that top-class documentation usually contains elements of both visual and written descriptions.

Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* (184, 423, –)

1980 **Greater London/Surrey** Richmond, adult, 23rd May (*Brit. Birds* 74: 457), was Greater London only.

1987 **Shetland** Baltasound, Unst, 30th May to 15th June, now presumed same as Haroldswick, Unst, 15th May, age uncertain (*Brit. Birds* 81: 542) (*The Birds of Shetland*, 2004).

This species was removed from the list of species considered on 31st December 2001.

(Local breeder in Morocco and throughout Mediterranean basin to Ukraine and Turkey. Occurs widely throughout France with regular breeding N to Belgium and occasionally Netherlands. Elsewhere, occurs throughout Indian subcontinent and SE Asia, N to Japan, locally within sub-Saharan Africa and widespread in North and South America.)

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* (78, 50, 2)

Ceredigion Aberleri, Dyfi, 3rd-5th June, photo (R. Bamford, R. Jones, J. Lee *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 246).

Glamorgan Lamby Lake, Cardiff, 24th-25th June (R. Mitchell *et al.*); also in Gwent.

Gwent Newport Wetlands Reserve, 11th June (R. de Borde *et al.*); same as Glamorgan.

(W Palearctic breeding population small and fragmented, centred on Mediterranean basin, from S Spain to Black Sea and E to Kazakhstan, with large population in Danube delta. W Palearctic population migratory, wintering in N tropical Africa. African population largely resident.)

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* (3, 118, 2)

Devon Bowling Green Marsh, 5th August, photo (R. Doble, A. Gladwin, K. Pragnall *et al.*).

Dorset Abbotsbury, 23rd March (S. A. Groves).

2002 **Buckinghamshire** Higher Denham, early January to end of February (M. Randall); same as High Wycombe, 16th January (*Brit. Birds* 96: 551).

(In Europe, common and widespread in S Spain and Portugal with small, expanding populations in France and Italy. N populations disperse outside breeding season. Widespread resident throughout much of Africa, S and SE Asia N to S China and Japan, Australia, S USA, N and C South America.)

Great White Egret *Ardea alba* (10, 189, 42)

Avon Chew Valley Lake, 20th-21st June, photo (A. H. Davies *et al.*); again, 11th-12th July, photo (R. M. Andrews, D. Angel *et al.*).

Berkshire Theale, 25th February (R. Addison).

Cambridgeshire Cam Washes, juvenile, 8th-9th July, photo, colour-ringed as pullus, Lac du Grande Lieu, Loire Atlantique, France, 30th April 2003 (B. S. Green, J. Oates *et al.*). Kingfishers Bridge, 28th July to 29th August, photo, colour-ringed; same as Abberton, Essex, below (J. Oates *et al.*).

Carmarthenshire Dinefwr Park, 7th, 17th August (T. Forster, J. & M. Stansfield). See also Pembrokeshire.

Cleveland Saltholme Pools, 11th July (M. Rowbottom).

Cumbria Bassenthwaite, 1st-2nd August, photo (P. Ullrich *et al.*).

Derbyshire Drakelow, 21st August intermittently to 12th October, photo (T. Cockburn).

Devon Colyford Marsh, Seaton, 31st August (P. Abbott, I. & S. Waite). Powderham Estate, 31st August, colour-ringed as pullus, Lac du Grande Lieu, Loire Atlantique, France, 26th June 2001; same as Essex, South Yorkshire (D. L. Buckingham *et al.*).

Dorset The Fleet (Abbotsbury and Langton Herring), 26th-29th June (S. A. Groves *et al.*); presumed same, 4th August (J. Down, S. A. Groves). Abbotsbury, 20th October (S. A. Groves). Sturminster Marshall, 16th August, intermittently to 26th October, again, 3rd-4th January 2004 (G. P. Green *et al.*), colour-ringed; see also Hampshire.

Essex Abberton Reservoir, 26th July, colour-ringed as pullus, Lac du Grande Lieu, Loire Atlantique, France, 26th June 2001; same as Devon, South Yorkshire (A. Kettle *et al.*).

Glamorgan Kenfig Pool, 5th October (H. Thomas).

Gloucestershire River Severn, Fretherne, 13th April (M. King).

Hampshire Mockbeggar and Ivy Lakes, Blashford, 21st August (L. Chappell, R. Howell), colour-ringed; same, 31st October intermittently to at least 24th January 2004 (D. E. J. Dicks, S. S. King *et al.*); see also Dorset. Langstone Harbour, 7th September (I. Calderwood); same, Testwood Lakes, 7th (S. S. King, I. Pibworth). Hurst Castle, 10th December (A. P. S. Hale). Arlebury Park, Alresford, 13th December to 16th February 2004, photo (D. Pearson *et al.*). Itchen Valley Country Park, 21st December (M. J. W. Hay).

Hertfordshire Wilstone Reservoir, 28th April (K. Austin, M. Mackay, R. Tomlin).

Highland Collabol, Loch Shin, Sutherland, 28th May (D. C. Davenport). Ruadh Loch, Achnahaird, Wester Ross, 1st June (P. Cosgrove). Loch Na Mair, Sutherland, 4th June, photo (J. Butterworth).

Kent Scotney Gravel-pits, 12th, 15th, 18th July (A. J. & B. J. Holcombe *et al.*), colour-ringed and possibly same as Cam Washes, Cambridgeshire (also in East Sussex below). Pegwell Bay, 22nd August (P. Forrest).

Lancashire & North Merseyside Eric Morecambe Pools, 5th August (M. Dawson, R. Hobbs, J. Reddish *et al.*).

Leicestershire Oakthorpe, 24th July (J. A. Sharpe *et al.*); probably same as Derbyshire and Staffordshire. Eyebrook Reservoir, 10th August, photo (R. M. Fray *et al.*); present 9th-12th; same, Rutland Water, 12th August to 23rd September (per R. M. Fray).

Lincolnshire Baston/Langtoft Gravel-pits, 31st March (W. Bowell). Gibraltar Point, 19th May, photo (M. M. Potter, J. S. Sansome). Frieston Shore, near Boston, 18th August (A. J. Blaydon, S. Keightley).

Lothian Gladhouse Reservoir, 13th June, photo (M. A. Wilkinson); also in Northumberland.

Norfolk Hickling, 11th January (A. D. Boote); presumed same, Warham Greens, 11th (A. M. Stoddart *et al.*). Snetterton Gravel-pits, 13th-14th February, photo (C. A. Holt *et al.*); presumed same as above. Caston, 13th March, photo (P. Newport). Overstrand, 14th April (G. Dormer, B. J. Murphy); presumed same, Sheringham, 14th (A. P. Benson). Holkham, 18th October (K. Barrett, P. Hawkins, H. Vaughan *et al.*). Holkham, 22nd October (J. R. McCallum); not same as 18th October. Burnham Norton, 27th October (A. J. L. Smith), presumed same as one of Holkham (above). Burnham Overy, 10th November (R. Johns, S. Morrison), presumed same as one of Holkham (above).

Northumberland Linton Pond, 29th May (A. Belshaw); same, Longhirst Flash, 29th-30th May (D. Elliot, R. Hunter), 8th and 10th-12th June (A. D. McLevy *et al.*); same, Bothal Pond, 8th June (A. D. McLevy *et al.*).

Nottinghamshire Holme Pierrepont, 20th July (D. C. Wood); same, Attenborough, 21st (T. P. Gibson).

Pembrokeshire Newport, 5th August, colour-ringed (P. K. Grennard); presumed same as Carmarthenshire.
Somerset Ham Wall, 8th June (J. L. Thomas).
Staffordshire Whitemoor Haye, 12th-19th October (D. Abbott, R. W. Key); same as Derbyshire.
Sussex, East Scotney Gravel-pits, 12th, 15th, 18th July (A. J. & B. J. Holcombe *et al.*), colour-ringed and possibly same as Cam Washes, Cambridgeshire; also in Kent. Rye Harbour, 23rd August (I. J. Whitcombe *et al.*).
Sussex, West Pagham Harbour, 7th September (T. Edwards, R. Prior *et al.*).
Yorkshire, South Denaby Ings, two, 19th-22nd July, one colour-ringed as pullus, Lac du Grande Lieu, Loire Atlantique, France, 26th June 2001; same as Devon, Essex (J. Denman, R. Gething *et al.*).
2001 Staffordshire Copmere, 22nd July, photo (G. & H. Hallwell).
2002 Cleveland See 2002 Lincolnshire below.
2002 Greater Manchester Chorlton Water Park, 11th August (*Brit. Birds* 96: 552), correct first observer/identifier was P. L. Hines.
2002 Lincolnshire Grainthorpe Marsh, 28th October to 4th November, again, 11th-27th November, 31st December (*Brit. Birds* 96: 552); link with Cleveland individual now considered invalid.
2002 Norfolk Hickling, three, 10th May (J. Hampshire); previously not considered acceptable (*Brit. Birds* 96: 606); presumed same as Stone Point, Essex, 11th (*Brit. Birds* 96: 552). Sea Palling, 17th December (J. Fisher).
2002 Northamptonshire Storton's Gravel-pit, three, 7th October; same, Pitsford Reservoir, 8th October; two of same, 9th; one or other, Stanwick Gravel-pit to 12th; one or other, Storton's Gravel-pit, 12th (*Brit. Birds* 96: 552); one or other, Earl's Barton Gravel-pit and Stanwick Gravel-pit, 13th (C. J. Coe *et al.*).
2002 Orkney North Ronaldsay, 2nd May, photo (P. J. Donnelly, B. & I. Muir *et al.*).
2002 Shetland Sand Water, Voe and Sae Water, 23rd-26th April, photo (G. Ball, M. S. Chapman, L. Robertson *et al.*); same, Loch of Spiggie, 19th-25th May, photo (A. & G. J. Fitchett *et al.*).
2002 Suffolk Minsmere, 20th May; same, North Warren, 21st (R. Drew *et al.*). Waldringfield, 19th June (T. Gray).
2002 Wiltshire Coate Water, 20th May (S. J. Covey *et al.*).
2002 Yorkshire, North Leyburn, 19th April (L. Caville, K. Durose).
1985 Shetland North Nesting, Mainland, 25th-26th June, now considered same as Caithness and Burrafirth (*Brit. Birds* 79: 531) (*The Birds of Shetland*, 2004).

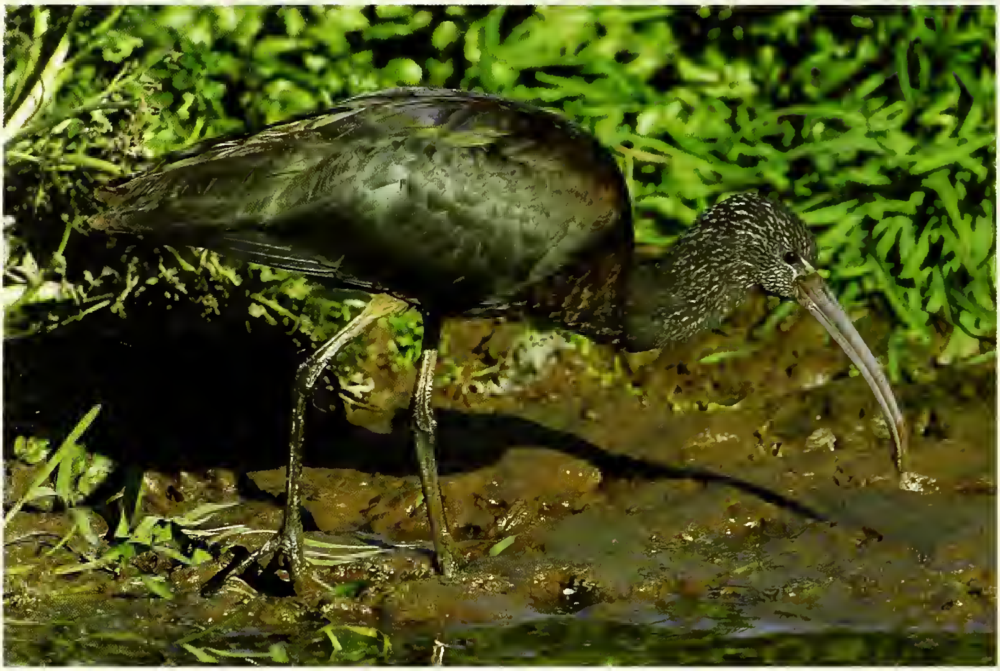
There is no escaping the fact that compiling the statistics for the number of individuals recorded is particularly difficult for this species, something referred to in last year's report (*Brit. Birds* 96: 552-553) but worth reiterating here. The total of 42 is our best estimate, given the advice and opinions of local observers on the ground. The movements of colour-ringed birds such as the one seen in Devon, Essex and South Yorkshire demonstrates that this large and obvious species is highly mobile. A broadly conservative approach to the number of different birds recorded over the course of the year in an area is probably wise in most cases; but, on the other hand, there is no doubt that Great White Egrets are on the increase in Britain.

(Small, but increasing breeding population in Netherlands. Elsewhere in Europe, highly fragmented breeding range from E Austria to Ukraine, but generally rare. W Palearctic population migratory, most wintering in N Africa and E Mediterranean, although recent trend to overwinter in C and NW Europe. Other populations breed across much of Africa, Asia, Australia and the Americas.)

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* (29, 129, 1)

Sussex, East Wych Cross, 25th May (L. & R. C. Owen, M. Scott-Ham).
2002 Devon East Okement Valley, 2nd, 3rd or 4th June (M. & S. Davies).
2002 Hertfordshire Amwell, 4th June (B. Reed).
2002 Kent Dungeness, 10th September (R. J. Price *et al.*).
2002 Suffolk Hawstead, 1st May (*Brit. Birds* 96: 553), previously published as Bury St Edmunds.
2002 Yorkshire, West Anglers Country Park, juvenile, 10th September (M. Spedding, M. Warrington)

(Breeds from C Iberia and E France through C Europe to Russia and, in small numbers, in N Greece and Turkey. To E, breeds widely in small numbers in forested temperate regions of Russia and Siberia to Russian Far East. Most are migratory, wintering in Africa, S and SE Asia.)



Paul Gale

334. Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*, Exe Estuary, Devon, March 2003.

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* (3, 86, 1)

Devon Exe Estuary, since September 2002 (*Brit. Birds* 96: 553), present throughout 2003 to April 2004 at least (plate 334); juvenile, 18th October (M. Tyler *et al.*), present from 3rd October to 23rd October. **2002 Norfolk** Strumpshaw Fen, 6th September (M. Chipperfield *et al.*); presumed same as various localities in Norfolk, 7th-10th September (*Brit. Birds* 96: 553).

With two blank years in the last six, Glossy Ibis remains a great rarity. It is, therefore, surprising to find that both records in 2003 came from the same locality. The first individual arrived as a juvenile among an exceptional group of eight in September 2002, and subsequently remained alone on the Exe estuary throughout 2003. Bowling Green Marsh, in particular, was a favourite haunt, although occasionally it moved to the nearby RSPB reserve of Exminster Marshes. Remarkably, a second individual, also a juvenile, arrived to join the original bird, then in its second winter, on 2nd October 2003, and both birds could often to be seen together at Bowling Green Marsh until 23rd October, when the newcomer departed.

(European breeding range centred N and W of Black Sea in Ukraine and Romania, with small, declining population in Balkans. Occasionally breeds France and Spain. To E, breeds from Volga River to Kazakhstan. Palearctic population migratory, most wintering in E Africa, small numbers remaining within Mediterranean basin. Resident or dispersive populations occur in Africa, S Asia, Australia, E USA and the Caribbean.)

Black Kite *Milvus migrans* (5, 308, 19)

Buckinghamshire Little Marlow Gravel-pits, 8th May (C. Bulloch, M. McQuaid, A. Stevens). Near Ivinghoe Beacon, 10th May (M. S. Wallen *et al.*).

Cambridgeshire Trumpington, 1st June (C. Hewson).

Cornwall Trethewey, 29th May (M. D. Warren, K. A. Wilson *et al.*).

Dorset Portland, 6th-7th August (C. E. Richards, K. Tucker); same, 10th August (G. Walbridge *et al.*); same, Weymouth, 6th August (B. Spencer).

Essex Shoeburyness, 24th April (S. Arlow).

Hampshire Millersford Bottom, New Forest, 6th May (M. Rafter).

Highland Kinbrace, Sutherland, 15th June to at least 8th July (N. Dales *et al.*); presumed returning individual of June to August 2002 (*Brit. Birds* 96: 560). Glen Glass, Easter Ross, 2nd August (R. H. Hogg).

Kent Margate, 3rd May (D. C. Gilbert, S. Tomlinson); same, Bockhill, 3rd, photo (J. & P. Chantler, R. Heading, B. A. Ryan *et al.*); same, Swalecliffe, 3rd (G. J. A. Burton, M. T. Gould, R. Jose). Pegwell Bay, 31st May (D. C. Gilbert, P. Milton).

Norfolk West Runton, 26th April (D. & M. Saunt). West Somerton/Rollesbury, 27th April (K. R. Dye *et al.*), possibly same as West Runton. Presumed same, Happisburgh, Eccles-on-Sea and Mundesley, 27th (M. Fiszer, A. J. Kane *et al.*). Sheringham, 27th April (R. Lee, T. Wright). Near Holt, 27th April (T. Eadson). Breydon, 29th April (P. R. Allard, C. Newcombe). Holme NOA, 30th April (J. Andrews, S. Barker).

Scilly St Mary's and Tresco, 17th-18th April, photo (E. A. Fisher, R. L. Flood, K. Webb *et al.*).

Suffolk Minsmere, Westleton Heath and Dunwich, 29th-30th April (R. Drew, N. C. Green *et al.*).

Sussex, East Beachy Head, 3rd August (M. E. & R. H. Charlwood *et al.*); same, East Dean, 3rd (J. Curson).

(Breeds throughout continental Europe, most in Spain, France and Germany, with smaller populations in all, except maritime NW Europe and Scandinavia. To E, breeds European Russia to Kazakhstan and C Siberia. Nominate race winters Africa and NW Indian subcontinent. Other races resident or dispersive in sub-Saharan Africa, Indian subcontinent, E and SE Asia and Australia.)

Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* (3, 11, 4)

Cornwall Sennen, ♂, 29th-30th March, photo (J. J. Gilroy, S. Mahood, R. Moores *et al.*) (plate 335).

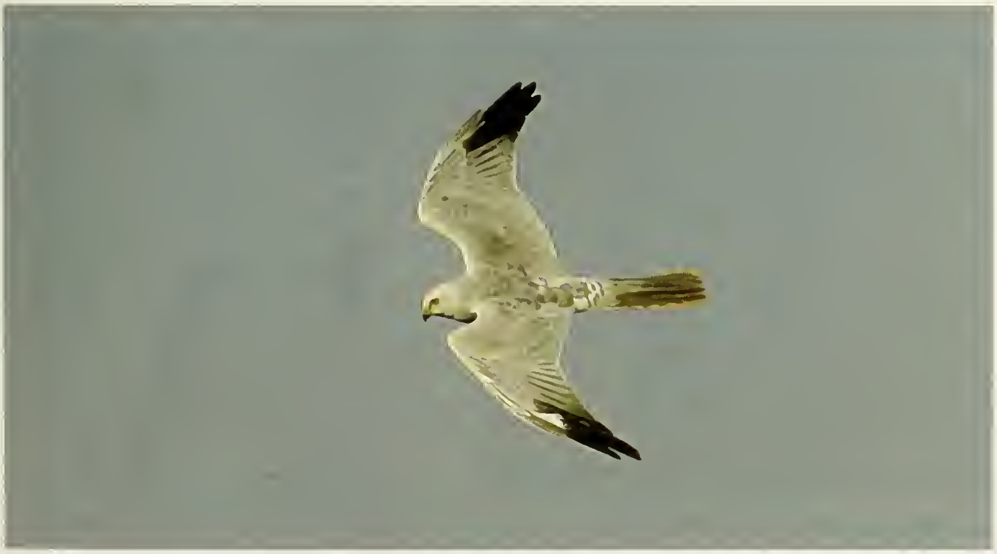
Norfolk Stiffkey and Warham Greens area, juvenile, since 24th December 2002 to 30th March (*Brit. Birds* 96: 560); same Cley and Blakeney, 23rd February. Blakeney Point, first-summer ♀, 16th-17th May (D. Boughtflower, J. R. McCallum, R. F. Porter *et al.*).

Shetland Baltasound/Haroldswick area, Unst, juvenile, 2nd-17th September, photo (S. E. Duffield, M. A. Maher *et al.*).

Yorkshire, East Spurn, ♂, 1st, 3rd April (A. Gibson, B. R. Spence *et al.*).

The best year since 1993 (for which there are five accepted records), and one from Shetland remains under consideration. This report includes the first instance of a Pallid Harrier overwintering in Britain; all other records have been migrants or potential breeders. What is clear is that there has been a substantial change in the occurrence of this species since 1993. Prior to that year there were only three British records (and none in the BBRC era), but since then there have been 15. Perhaps the decline of collective farming in the Asian breeding grounds really is affecting their range.

(Fragmented range on steppe grasslands from Ukraine E through Russia to 100°E and S to Kazakhstan. Occasionally breeds to W of main breeding range in Europe. Migratory, wintering throughout much of E and C Africa and the Indian subcontinent.)



Paul Gale

335. Male Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*, Sennen, Cornwall, March 2003.

Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus* (85, 641, 24)

Berkshire Pingewood Gravel-pits, Reading, first-summer ♂, 4th-9th July, photo (R. Crawford *et al.*).
Cambridgeshire Fen Drayton, ♀, 28th June (A. Hitchings, R. M. Patient). Wicken Fen, first-summer ♂, 19th-30th August, photo (J. Oates, P. S. Prince *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 330).
Devon Lundy, ♂, 30th May (J. Roberts, B. Sampson).
Dorset Abbotsbury, first-summer ♀, 29th May (S. A. Groves).
Essex Great Leighs, ♀, 2nd August (G. C. Bond).
Greater Manchester Horwich, ♀, 14th-15th September (A. Makin, C. Marston, J. Nisbet *et al.*).
Hampshire Acres Down, New Forest, ♀, 31st May (S. Buckell, W. Percy).
Kent Dungeness, ♂, 31st May (A. J. Holcombe, M. & Mrs J. Overall *et al.*). Grove Hill and Collards Lake, first-summer ♂, 31st May (P. Alfrey, F. Cackett, S. Woods). Eastborough/Northward Hill, first-summer ♂, 1st June, photo (A. Parker *et al.*). Kingsdown, ♂, 15th June (J. R. Chantler, R. Heading, N. L. Jarman).
Lincolnshire Baston and Deeping Fen area, first-summer ♂, 12th June to 2nd September (J. J. Gilroy *et al.*). Barton-on-Humber, first-summer ♂, 25th-26th July, photo (G. P. Catley *et al.*).
Norfolk Cley, ♀, 31st May (S. J. Aspinall). Hickling, first-summer ♂, ♀ and two first-summer ♀♀, 31st May to 2nd June (T. Barker, J. Hampshire, A. M. Stoddart *et al.*). Upton Fen, first-summer ♀, 28th-29th June (O. Campbell *et al.*).
Northeast Scotland Collieston, first-summer ♀, 20th August to 24th September, photo (C. N. Gibbins *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 331).
Orkney Kirkwall, first-summer ♂, 18th June to 4th July, photo (C. J. Booth, Mr & Mrs M. Clouston).
Warwickshire Wormleighton Reservoir, first-summer ♂, 15th May (J. J. Bowley).
Yorkshire, North Scalby Mills, ♂, 1st June (B. & C. Richards).
1992 Cambridgeshire Fen Drayton, first-summer ♂, 7th June (R. M. Patient).
2001 Cambridgeshire Fen Drayton, ♀, 26th May (R. M. Patient).
2002 Suffolk North Warren, ♀, 10th July (R. N. Macklin).

Both the predominance of first-summers (at least 14 of the 24 individuals, and possibly some of the six unaged females as well) and the geographical bias towards the southeast in 2003 were typical. Even during the invasion year of 1992 (no fewer than 126 accepted records), the vast majority of birds for which the age was determined were in their second calendar-year.

Even with an average of almost 15 records per year during 1994-2003, the 24 in 2003 represent a bumper year for this attractive falcon. Birders may

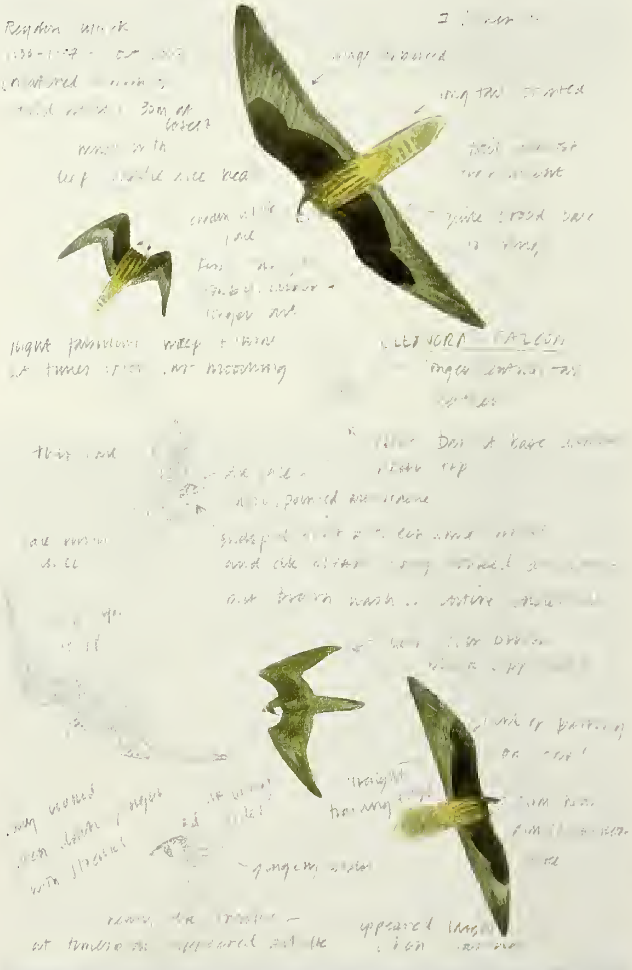


Fig. 2. Adult pale-morph Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonorae*, Reydon, Suffolk, October 2003.

Brian Small

question why, given these numbers, BBRC continues to regard this species as a national rarity. Established guidelines for removal of species from the BBRC list require that more than 150 individuals have occurred during the previous decade, with ten or more in at least eight of those years. In this case, there have been 148 accepted records in the past decade and so, currently, it falls just short of the criteria for removal.

(Breeding range highly fragmented across wooded steppe of E Europe, from E Hungary to temperate Russia, E to Baikal region. Numbers breeding in Europe small and declining. Migratory, wintering in SW Africa.)

Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonorae* (0, 4, 1)

Suffolk Reydon, adult pale-morph, 3rd October (B. J. & J. Small) (fig. 2).

This majestic falcon was a most unexpected find, arriving with a late 'push' of hirundines along the Suffolk coast. It may well have arrived earlier in the day; what was probably the same bird was reported at Minsmere earlier that morning, and it was almost certainly seen by a group at Benacre Broad later in the afternoon, but somewhat distantly. This is the fifth for Britain, following those in Merseyside in August 1977 (*Brit. Birds* 72: 517), in East Yorkshire in October 1981 (*Brit. Birds* 78: 541), on South Uist, Outer Hebrides, in June 1985 (*Brit. Birds* 83: 459), and in Norfolk in July 1987 (*Brit. Birds* 94: 468). Pale-morphs outnumber dark-morphs by around 3:1 on the breeding grounds (*BWP Concise*).

(Breeds from Canary Islands and coastal Morocco E through Mediterranean basin to Cyprus. Many populations small and restricted to offshore islands. Most numerous in Aegean Sea, but increasing in Balearics. Migrates through E Africa to winter south to coastal Mozambique and Madagascar.)

Gyr Falcon *Falco rusticolus* (15, 124, 0)

2002 Orkney Queenamidda, Rendall, 22nd-23rd March (J. B. Ribbands); same as Greeny Hill, Mainland, 6th-8th April (*Brit. Birds* 96: 563).

(Within Europe, most numerous in Iceland and Norway, with smaller populations breeding northern Sweden, Finland and Arctic Russia. To east, breeds across Arctic Siberia, Alaska, northern Canada and Greenland. European birds mostly resident but high Arctic breeders from northern Canada and Greenland strongly migratory, occasionally wintering south to northwest Europe.)

Little Crake *Porzana parva* (74, 31, 1)

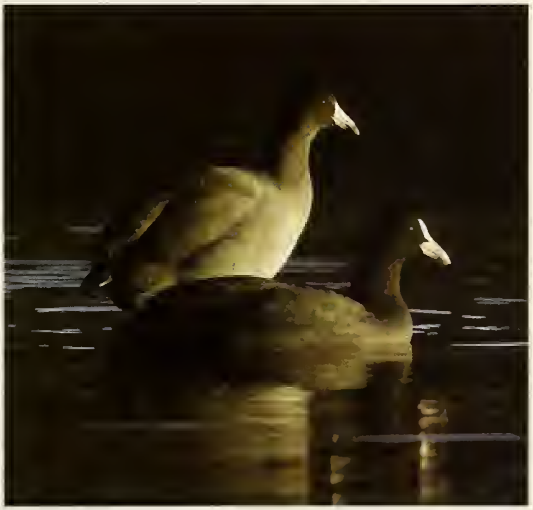
Scilly St Mary's, juvenile, 20th October, photo (R. L. Flood *et al.*).

(Fragmented distribution across temperate steppe of W Palearctic, from Austria through Ukraine and European Russia to W Siberia and C Kazakhstan. Small numbers occasionally breed to N and W, reaching Netherlands, Finland and Spain. Most winter in NE and E Africa, although some occur W to Senegal.)

American Coot *Fulica americana* (0, 2, 1)

Shetland Loch of Clickimin, first-winter, 30th November to 5th April 2004, photo (S. E. Duffield *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 97: plates 27 & 336).

The single accepted record listed here does not do justice to the happenings of winter 2003/04, since the Shetland bird was the first of three American Coots to arrive in Scotland between November 2003 and February 2004 (two other records, from the Western Isles and Dumfries & Galloway, remain under consideration). With only two previous British records (Kent, April 1996; Cumbria, April 1999) and one in Ireland (Co. Cork in February to April 1981), this mini-influx was not only truly remarkable but also suggests that these earlier individuals might have crossed the Atlantic to


Hugh Harrop

336. First-winter American Coot *Fulica americana* (rear) with Common Coot *F. atra*, Loch of Clickimin, Shetland, December 2003.

Britain & Ireland during the preceding autumn, and not arrived here via the Azores and Iberia, and then migrated northwards in the company of wintering Common Coots *F. atra*.

(Breeds across temperate southern Canada and the USA, from Vancouver Island E to New Brunswick, and S throughout much of the USA, Mexico, the West Indies and Central America, with isolated populations in N and C Andes. Northern populations migratory, wintering in southern USA, occasionally N to south Ontario, Canada.)

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* (143, 202, 1)

Norfolk Titchwell, since 1993 (*Brit. Birds* 87: 521; 96: 565), present throughout 2003 (per G. E. Dunmore).

Sussex, West Locality withheld, 27th September (L. & R. Knight).

2002 **Suffolk** Lakenheath Fen, two, 8th May (*Brit. Birds* 96: 565); correct dates were 8th-11th May.

(Breeds along Atlantic coast of France and locally throughout Mediterranean basin to Black Sea. To E, breeds from S Siberia and C Asia to NW China. Most European birds winter in sub-Saharan Africa and, increasingly, in SW Iberia. Asian breeders winter across S and SE Asia and S China. Other races occur in Australasia, the Americas and Hawaii.)

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola* (35, 54, 1)

Orkney Loch of Tankerness, 30th May, photo (K. E. Hague).

(Breeds locally in Mediterranean basin from N Africa and S Iberia to Black Sea, most in S Spain, Portugal and Greece. To E, breeds across SW Asia to Pakistan and Kazakhstan but distribution highly fragmented. Winters sub-Saharan Africa. Other races resident in Africa.)

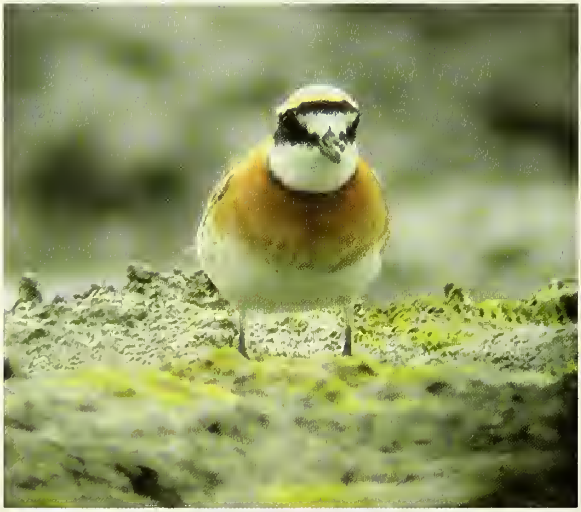
Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus* (0, 2, 1)

Hampshire Keyhaven Marshes, ♂, 22nd-26th July, photo (L. Chappell *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 311; 97: plate 337).

As with a number of previous sand plover records, this individual initially caused much confusion and some observers thought it most likely to be a Greater Sand Plover *C. leschenaultii*. The recent paper by Garner, Lewington & Slack (*Birding World* 16: 377-385) has gone some way towards further clarification of the characters for identification of this species pair, although the authors were concerned primarily with the criteria to enable separation of Lesser Sand Plovers of the *atrifrons* and *mongolus* subspecies groupings. The Keyhaven individual, with its extensive white forehead and darker flank markings, would clearly fit into the *mongolus* group, and this is supported by several subsidiary features.

Observers fortunate enough to find one of these stunning birds in breeding plumage may ultimately have more than just the elimination of Greater Sand Plover to contend with, since individuals from both groups of Lesser Sand Plover have the potential to occur as vagrants in the UK. A review of the sand plover on the Don Estuary, Northeast Scotland, in August 1991 (and currently accepted as a Greater Sand Plover; *Brit. Birds* 85: 525) was unfortunately not completed in time for this report, although at the time of writing, the evidence suggests that it may eventually be accepted as the first Lesser Sand Plover for Britain.

(Nominate *mongolus* group breeds in mountains and tundra of Arctic E Siberia, Kamchatka and Kommander Islands. Distinct *atrifrons* group breeds from C Pamir and Tien Shan ranges across mountains of W China and N Kashmir to Tibetan plateau. Migratory, wintering along tropical coasts of S and E Africa, Persian Gulf, Indian subcontinent, S China, SE Asia and Australia.)



Jim Lawrence

337. Male Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus*, Keyhaven Marshes, Hampshire, July 2003.

American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica* (1, 227, 15)

Argyll Ardnave Loch, Islay, juvenile, 21st September to 2nd November, photo (J. Dickson *et al.*).
Avon Blagdon Lake, juvenile, 1st-2nd November (N. Milbourne *et al.*); also in Somerset.
Cambridgeshire Kneesworth, adult, 28th September (S. L. Cooper *et al.*).
Cornwall Predannack Airfield, adult, 1st October, photo (A. R. Pay).
Fife Eden Estuary, adult, 28th-29th September (D. E. Dickson, G. Evans, A. Watt).
Lancashire & North Merseyside Marshside and Crossens Marsh, juvenile, 19th October intermittently to 9th November (N. Hunt, B. McCarthy, S. Tomlinson *et al.*).
Norfolk Breydon, adult, 12th-19th October, photo (P. R. Allard *et al.*), also Breydon south shore, Suffolk, 16th-20th (per D. F. Walsh).
Scilly St Agnes, adult, 15th September (D. Page); juvenile, 6th October (D., H. & I. Bradshaw, A. Jayne, D. Page *et al.*); same, St Mary's, 7th, 9th, photo (per J. K. Higginson) (plate 338).
Shetland Sandwick, adult, 5th-22nd September, photo (G. & V. Blackman *et al.*). Fair Isle, juvenile, 3rd-8th November, photo (D. N. Shaw *et al.*). Fleck, juvenile, 5th November (P. M. Ellis).
Somerset Priddy, juvenile, 5th November (A. H. Davies, S. Isgar); same as Avon.
Suffolk See Norfolk.
Yorkshire, North Nosterfield, probably first-summer, 5th May, photo (A. M. Hanby *et al.*). North Bishopthorpe, adult, 30th September to 7th October, photo (A. J. Booth, D. Poyser *et al.*).
Yorkshire, South Old Moor, juvenile, 20th-22nd September, photo (R. S. Slack *et al.*).
1992 Argyll Colonsay, adult, 3rd to at least 5th October, photo. Previously accepted (*Brit. Birds* 86: 477), now considered inadequately documented as this species, but see American or Pacific Golden Plover below.
1995 Lancashire & North Merseyside Fishmoor Reservoir, Blackburn, juvenile, 28th October to 11th November, photo (W. C. Aspin, J. F. Wright *et al.*).
1995 Yorkshire, East Buckton, juvenile/first-winter, 22nd October to 7th November (D. Waudby).
1999 Hampshire Keyhaven Marsh area, juvenile, 31st October to 28th November (T. Parminter *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 94: 502); originally published as Needs Ore Point, and as not accepted, in error. Needs Ore Point, juvenile, 30th October (*Brit. Birds* 94: 469); originally published as Keyhaven Marsh area and as accepted, in error.
2002 Central Region Kinniel Kerse, juvenile, 26th October (D. Thoroughgood).

A good year for this species, following the poor showing in 2002 (just three records, including the one in mainland Scotland, above). The 15 accepted records in 2003 raise the current ten-year average to a shade over 11 per annum and the additional 1995 records mean that there are now four years in the last decade with 15 or more. Fig. 3 shows the trend towards increasing numbers which has been apparent since the early 1970s. As with many rarities, the growth in number of observers, together

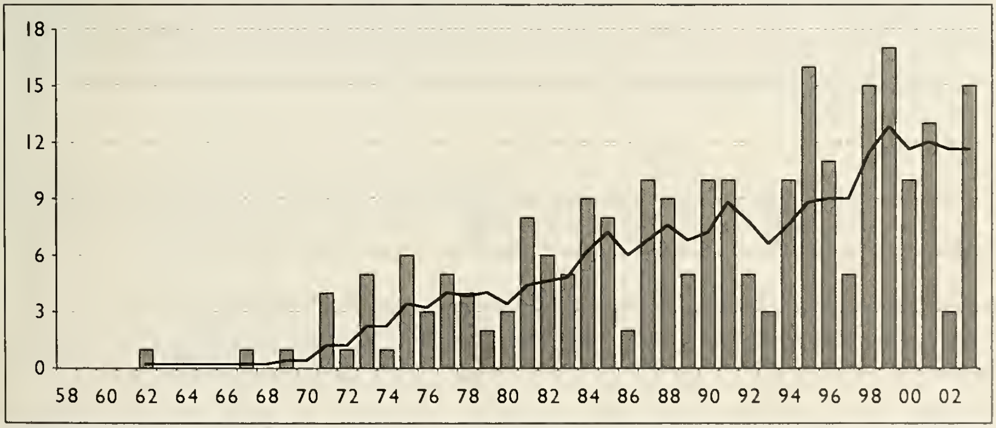


Fig. 3. Numbers of American Golden Plovers *Pluvialis dominica* recorded annually in Britain, 1958-2003. There is a clear trend of increasing numbers, beginning in the early 1970s, emphasised here by use of a five-year rolling mean. Much of this increase may be attributable to the increase in active observers since that period, and a greater understanding of field identification.

Gary Bellingham

338. Juvenile American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*, St Mary's, Scilly, October 2003.

with an improved knowledge of field identification, has undoubtedly contributed to this trend.

With regard to field identification, a recent paper by Johnson & Johnson (*Wader Study Group Bull.* 103: 42-49; see also *Brit. Birds* 97: 434-443) examined the published identification criteria separating this species from Pacific Golden Plover *P. fulva.* The authors suggested that the only reliable characteristics to separate individuals of known identity were breeding plumage, the number of primaries exposed beyond the longest tertial, and primary projection past the end of the tail, and that all other identification criteria are not diagnostic owing to the individual variation shown by the two species. Given the problems that certain vagrants to the UK have posed, this may come as no surprise and reinforces the view that a careful approach is still required, although the differences in plumage coloration between juveniles of the two species will usually allow relatively straightforward separation at this age.

The bird in North Yorkshire in May 2003 is another well-documented occurrence of an individual apparently in first-summer plumage (following the well-photographed one on Scilly from 30th May to 5th June 2000, and several others). These individuals are interesting because, unlike Pacific Golden Plover, American Golden Plover is not known to assume a first-summer plumage (Byrkjedal & Thompson 1998, *Tundra Plovers*, Poyser). It seems likely that the moult cycles of these individuals may have been disrupted, perhaps as a consequence of geographical displacement; indeed, whether they can be aged definitively as second-calendar-years may be doubtful.

(Breeds on coastal tundra from extreme NE Siberia, E across N Alaska and Canada to Baffin Island. Migrates over W Atlantic to wintering grounds in S South America.)

Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva* (3, 50, 2)

Northeast Scotland Ythan Estuary, juvenile, 2nd-16th November, photo (P. A. A. Baxter, P. S. Crockett, C. N. Gibbins *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides North Boisdale/Daliburgh, South Uist, adult, 9th February to at least 5th April 2003 (A. Stevenson *et al.*), presumed returning bird from 2001 and 2002 (*Brit. Birds* 96: 567).

Sussex, East Rye Harbour, first-summer, 1st to at least 19th April, photo (R. J. Fairbank, P. M. Troake *et al.*).

2002 Durham Whitburn, adult, 18th-29th September, photo (D. M. Foster *et al.* per B. Unwin) (*Brit Birds* 95: plate 348).

(Breeds across Siberian tundra from Yamal peninsula E to Chukotskiy Peninsula, including New Siberian islands, and W Alaska. Although small numbers winter regularly in Kenya and Persian Gulf, main wintering range extends from Indian subcontinent to S China and Japan, S through SE Asia to Australia, New Zealand and islands in C Pacific.)

American/Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica/fulva* (4, 302, –)

1992 Argyll Colonsay, adult, 3rd to at least 5th October, photo, previously accepted as American Golden Plover (*Brit. Birds* 86: 477), but now considered indeterminate American or Pacific Golden Plover.

Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla* (1, 69, 4)

Norfolk Breydon Water and Berney Marshes, juvenile/first-winter, 26th September (P. R. Allard, A. Grieve, B. W. Jarvis).

Scilly St Mary's, adult, 2nd-8th August, photo (J. M. Turton, P. L. Varney *et al.*). St Agnes, juvenile, 16th-17th September, photo (E. A. Fisher, R. L. Flood, A. Morris *et al.*).
Shetland Fair Isle, adult, 13th August, photo (A. J. Bull, D. N. Shaw *et al.*).

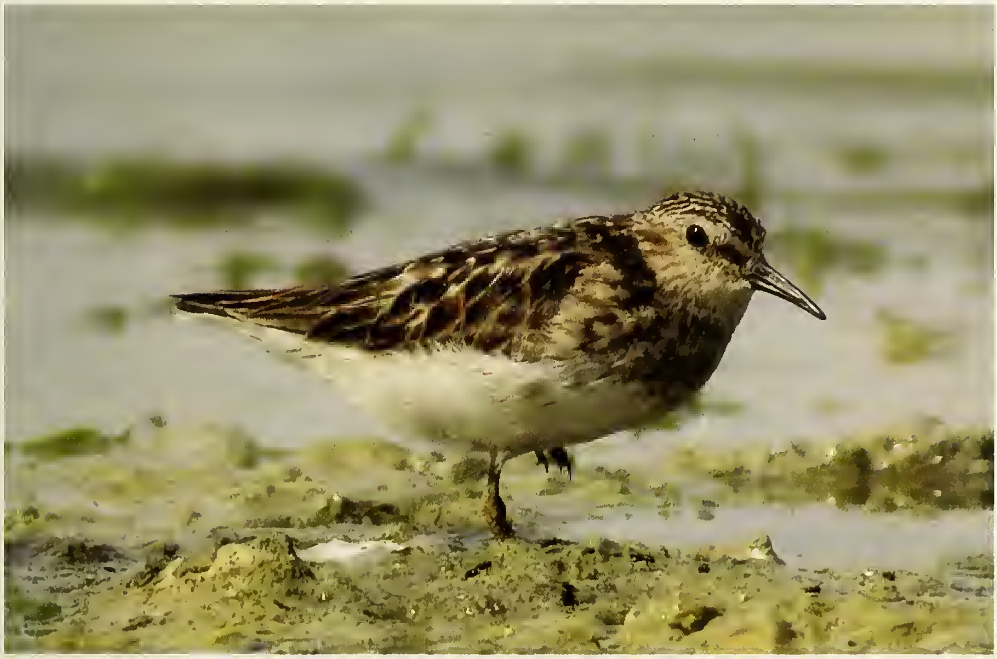
These records are all on classic dates for what is clearly the most regular of the North American 'peeps' to occur on this side of the Atlantic. The individual on St Mary's was extraordinarily tame, allowing observers to approach to within two or three metres.

(Breeds on tundra of W Alaska, E across Arctic Canada to S Baffin Island and coastal Labrador. Has bred in extreme NE Siberia. Migrates across Great Plains and E seaboard of USA to winter in C America and shorelines of tropical South America to Brazil and Peru.)

Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla* (6, 24, 1)

Hertfordshire Startops End Reservoir, adult, 5th-12th August, photo (W. Pegram *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 332; 97: plate 339).

(Breeds in C and S Alaska, E across N Canada, to Labrador and Newfoundland. Winters in S USA, C America, the Caribbean and South America, S to Brazil and N Chile.)



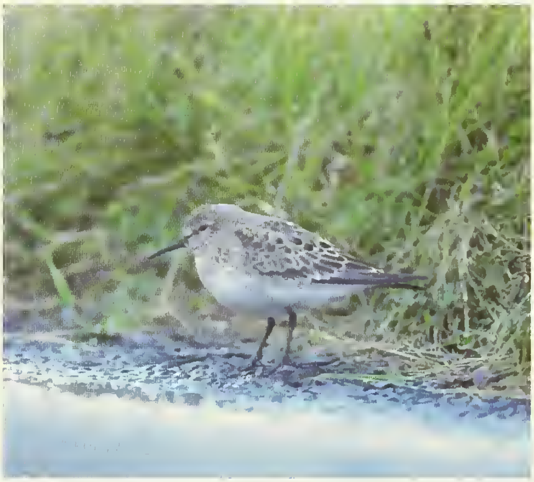
George Reszeter

339. Adult Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla*, Startops End Reservoir, Hertfordshire, August 2003.

White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis* (24, 342, 7)

Gwent Goldcliff Pools, adult, 2nd July (A. E. D. Hickman).
Lancashire & North Merseyside Wyre Estuary, adult, 3rd-11th August, photo (P. Slade).
Norfolk Cley, adult, 23rd June, photo (R. G. Millington *et al.*). Hickling, adult, 22nd-27th July, photo (P. J. Heath, A. J. Kane *et al.*).
Shetland Norwick, Unst, juvenile, killed by car, 10th October, now at National Museums of Scotland (G. Bundy, M. A. Maher, M. G. Pennington *et al.*) (plate 340). Fair Isle, juvenile, 10th-11th October, photo (H. I. Scott *et al.*).
Yorkshire, East Spurn, adult, 27th July, photo (J. Grist *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 312).
2002 **Hampshire** Testwood Lake, adult, 15th-16th September, photo (E. Rolfe, P. Winter).

The seven records of White-rumped Sandpiper in Britain in 2003, comprising five early-autumn adults and two late-season juveniles, constitute a fairly typical year. This is despite the above-average numbers of other Nearctic waders recorded in Britain and elsewhere in western Europe (notably American Golden Plovers *Pluvialis dominica*), and in particular the large numbers of White-rumped



Mike Pennington

340. Juvenile White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*, Norwick, Unst, Shetland, October 2003.

Sandpipers in Ireland during the autumn.

The pattern of age-related occurrence of this species is interesting, but not always easy to explain. In most years, juveniles are found in Britain from late September onwards only, the majority of these turning up in southwest Britain, but in some particularly good years for this species (e.g. 1996, 18 records) juveniles begin to appear in early September. By contrast, in other bumper years (such as 1984, 24 records) there have been relatively few records of juveniles, and nor was this age-class plentiful in the preceding year either (an influx of juveniles might provide one reason for a surge in records of adults the following season).

(Breeds in N Alaska and Arctic Canada, from Mackenzie River E to S Baffin Island. Overflies W Atlantic to winter in S South America.)

Baird's Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii* (4, 165, 4)

Norfolk Salthouse, juvenile, 8th September, photo (R. Cobbold *et al.*).
Northumberland Hauxley, adult, 28th June, photo (M. J. Carr, I. Fisher, B. Galloway *et al.*).
Shetland Foula, juvenile, 1st, 6th September, photo (R. B. Wynn *et al.*).
Yorkshire, North Nosterfield, juvenile, 20th-23rd September, photo (A. M. Hanby *et al.*).
2001 **Moray & Nairn** Findhorn Bay, juvenile, 21st-23rd September (D. M. Pullan *et al.*).
2002 **Northeast Scotland** Slains, juvenile, 17th September (P. Shepherd).

After just a single record in 2002 (above), the four in 2003 is a more typical return, and the three in September conform to the expected temporal pattern. At least one other (in Lothian) remains outstanding. Less typical was the east-coast bias, which gave birders in the north and east of Britain a chance to see this species closer to home. These records also coincided with a large arrival of Pectoral Sandpipers *Calidris melanotos*.

Spring birds, like the one in Northumberland in June, sometimes provoke discussion about their identification as they do not fit the normal 'search image' that we have for autumn juveniles. They often appear much warmer-toned, rather more robust and with a different scapular pattern. Nevertheless, careful assessment of size and structure, as well as an understanding of plumage differences, usually make identification straightforward.

(Breeds extreme NE Siberia on Chukotskiy Peninsula and Wrangel Island, E across N Alaska and Arctic Canada, to N Baffin Island and NW Greenland. Migrates through North American interior to winter in South American Andes, from S Ecuador to Tierra del Fuego.)

Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus* (21, 180, 2)

Cleveland Saltholme Pools, 6th June (J. B. Dunnett).
Yorkshire, East Patrington Haven, juvenile, 12th October (G. E. Dobbs).
2002 **Yorkshire, North** Nosterfield, 15th May (K. Durose, S. Worwood *et al.*).

(Nominate European race breeds in boreal forest bogs of N Norway, Sweden and Finland, and into Arctic Russia, where distribution uncertain. European birds migrate through E Mediterranean, Black and Caspian Seas to winter in Persian Gulf, W India and Sri Lanka, with small numbers in coastal E Africa. E race *L. f. sibirica* breeds from Taimyr Peninsula to Kolyma River delta, and winters from Bay of Bengal through coastal SE Asia to Australia.)

Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis* (8, 612, –)

1964 **Leicestershire** Belvoir, two, 7th-8th September (*Brit. Birds* 58: 361), now considered inadequately documented.

1974 **Dorset** Ferrybridge, juvenile, 9th-12th September, photo (the late F. R. Clafton, G. Walbridge *et al.*).

This species was removed from the list of species considered on 31st December 1982.

(Localised breeding range extends from Aion Island E to the Ekryratap River valley on the Chukotskiy Peninsula, and Wrangel Island, Russia, then E across tundra of northern Alaska to Yukon, Northwest Territories and Queen Elizabeth Islands, Canada. Most migrate S through mid-west USA, with small numbers following Atlantic seaboard, to winter on Río de la Plata grasslands of Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentina.)

Great Snipe *Gallinago media* (many, 117, 0)

2000 **Orkney** Queenamidda, adult, 2nd October (B. Ribbands *et al.*).

(Scarce and local breeder in Norway and Sweden, which hold most of declining European population. Smaller and fragmented population breeds from Poland to Estonia. Also breeds E through European Russia, W and N Siberia to Yenisey River but population trends here unknown. Winters in sub-Saharan Africa.)

Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus* (7, 159, 0)

Highland See 2002 Highland below.

1985 Essex Heybridge Gravel-pits, juvenile, 29th September to 5th October; presumed same, Old Hall Marshes, 15th October (*Brit. Birds* 79: 548), to 26th January 1986 (P. Gothem *et al* per N. C. Green).

1986 Essex See 1985 Essex above.

1988 Shetland Baltasound, Unst, first-winter, 6th December to 29th April 1989, now considered same as Fetlar, 18th October (*Brit. Birds* 82: 526).

2000 **Lancashire & North Merseyside** Seaforth, juvenile/first-winter, 28th October to 5th April 2001 (*Brit. Birds* 94: 473), found and identified by A. J. Conway and T. Vaughan.

2002 **Carmarthenshire** Penclacwydd, juvenile/first-winter, 16th October to at least 8th December (M. Holding, N. W. Walter *et al.*).

2002 **Highland** Inver Bay, Ross & Cromarty, first-winter, 8th November to 16th March 2003 (D. P. Butterfield *et al.*).

(Breeds primarily in Arctic Siberia where range is expanding W to Lena River delta. North American range restricted to coastal tundra of W and N Alaska, and E to Mackenzie River. Migrates through USA to winter from coastal S USA to N Central America.)

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* (12, 109, 3)

Cleveland Saltholme Pools, 5th-6th May, photo (J. B. Dunnett, G. Lawler *et al.*).

Kent Elmley, 25th-28th April (G. W. Allison, M. Dengate *et al.*).

Suffolk Great Livermere Lake, 17th April (M. & Mrs R. Wright).

2002 **Kent** Elmley, two juveniles, 16th-26th August, photo (G. W. Allison *et al.*).

Although numbers fluctuate from year to year, Marsh Sandpiper remains a good find. Wandering adults and juveniles in July and August are the norm, so three individuals in early spring are noteworthy, and constitute the first April records since one at Stanpit Marsh, Dorset, in 2000. The belated acceptance of two in Kent, in August 2002, brings that year's total to six.

(Occasionally breeds in Finland and Baltic countries to Ukraine and W Russia. To E, breeds commonly across forest-steppe region of Siberia to Mongolia and NE China. Winters commonly throughout sub-Saharan Africa, especially E Africa, and Indian subcontinent E to S China and SE Asia; also Australia.)

Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes* (37, 204, 12)

Argyll Loch Gruinart, Islay, 25th-27th May (T. ap Rheinallt *et al.*).

Cleveland Saltholme and Dorman's Pools, adult, 13th-14th August, photo (J. B. Dunnett *et al.*). Greatham Tank Farm and Cowpen Marsh, juvenile, 22nd September to 19th October, photo (M. A. Blick *et al.*).

Cornwall Land's End, age uncertain, 1st October (M. D. Warren). Hayle, first-winter, 20th October to 25th April 2004, photo (S. M. Christophers *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 97: plate 54).

Devon Dawlish Warren, 23rd May (L. Collins, J. E. Fortey *et al.*). Exminster Marshes, 23rd May (P. Boulden *et al.*).

Northumberland Hauxley, 5th-11th May, photo (J. Alexander *et al.*).

Orkney Loch of Tankerness, juvenile, 3rd-4th September, photo (K. E. Hague).

Pembrokeshire Dale, juvenile, 19th October to 16th November (J. Best, S. Devonald, T. J. Price). Newgale, juvenile, 5th-6th December (P. Jenks *et al.*).

Yorkshire, South Thorne Moors, adult, 27th April to 2nd May, photo (J. Blake, J. O'Malley, M. Stoakes *et al.*).

1964 Leicestershire/Northamptonshire Stanford Reservoir, 17th-23rd October (*Brit. Birds* 58: 360), now considered inadequately documented.

1999 Orkney Birsay Bay, age uncertain, 26th October (B. Ribbands *et al.*).

2002 Cheshire Elton Hall Flash, juvenile, 17th October, photo (D. Bowyer, A. J. Firth *et al.*).

2002 Durham Washington, adult, 18th-20th May (A. Donnington, B. Unwin *et al.*).

2002 Hertfordshire Amwell, juvenile/first-winter, 18th-28th October (B. Reed *et al.*).

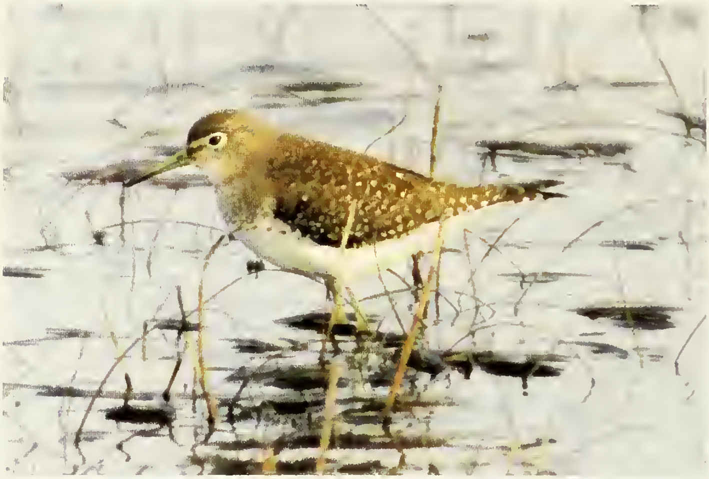
(Breeds throughout much of subarctic Alaska and Canada, E to James Bay. Migrates through USA, where some overwinter, but majority winter from Caribbean and C America to Chile and Argentina.)

Solitary Sandpiper *Tringa solitaria* (5, 22, 2)

Outer Hebrides Gravir, Lewis, 23rd-24th October, photo (M. Witherall *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 405; 97: plate 341).

Scilly St Mary's, adult, 23rd-27th July, photo; same, Tresco, 25th, 27th (R. L. Flood *et al.*).

(Breeds C and S Alaska through subarctic Canada to Quebec and Labrador. Migrates throughout USA and winters in Caribbean and C America, S to Argentina.)



Mark Witherall

341. Solitary Sandpiper *Tringa solitaria*, Gravir, Lewis, Outer Hebrides, October 2003.

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* (3, 59, 1)

Northumberland East Chevington, 12th June, photo (A. D. McLevy *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 275).

Could this be a returning individual on passage through northeast England, and recorded previously in East Yorkshire in June 2002 (*Brit. Birds* 96: 572) and in Northumberland in June 2001 (*Brit. Birds* 95: 495)? It is not unheard of for vagrant waders to reappear at particular sites and ringing recoveries have also illustrated such site fidelity in migrant waders. Terek Sandpiper has previously shown a predilection for returning to the northeast, with an individual wintering on the Blyth estuary, Northumberland, from 1989 to 1991.

(European range restricted to small population in N Gulf of Bothnia, Finland, and Belarus. To E, breeds widely but locally throughout N Russia to E Siberia. Winters widely along coasts of S and E Africa to Persian Gulf, Indian subcontinent, SE Asia and Australasia.)

Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius* (9, 118, 2)

Avon Barrow Gurney Reservoirs, age uncertain, 2nd November, photo (C. J. Stone, K. E. Vinicombe *et al.*).

Derbyshire Ogston Reservoir, 30th April to 1st May, photo (M. J. Blount, A. Hardman, M. Miles *et al.*).

(Breeds over much of North America from W Alaska to Newfoundland and S to California, Texas and North Carolina. Some winter in coastal USA to S of breeding range but most winter in C America, Caribbean and N South America, S to N Argentina and Chile.)

Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla* (2, 93, 2)

Angus & Dundee Loch of Kinnordy, adult, 26th April (A. J. Leitch).

Cleveland Port Clarence, second-summer, 16th July, photo (J. B. Dunnett, J. Grieveson *et al.*).

1977 Cheshire Fiddler's Ferry, adult, 3rd August (*Brit. Birds* 71: 506), now considered inadequately documented.

Laughing Gull must be one of the most unpredictable of the regular rarities that occur in Britain.

Records can come from almost anywhere at almost any time. The two records here, one in spring, one in summer, illustrate this, while a report of one on Scilly in late autumn remains outstanding. The 1977 Cheshire record was initially the subject of a boundary dispute, the location having been given originally as Lancashire, but after reviewing the record it was clearly no longer acceptable. BBRC usually reviews old records only as part of a formal species review or if asked to do so by the County Recorder, and the latter was the reason in this case.

(Locally common from Nova Scotia, S along E seaboard of USA to Florida and Gulf coast, the Caribbean, and C America to N Venezuela. S populations largely resident but N breeders winter within S breeding range.)

Bonaparte's Gull *Larus philadelphia* (12, 104, 3)

Hampshire Langstone Harbour and Farlington Marshes, first-summer, 1st-6th June, photo (J. Crook).

Norfolk Hickling, first-winter/first-summer, 3rd-25th May, photo (D. Brown, J. J. Gilroy, S. Mahood *et al.*).

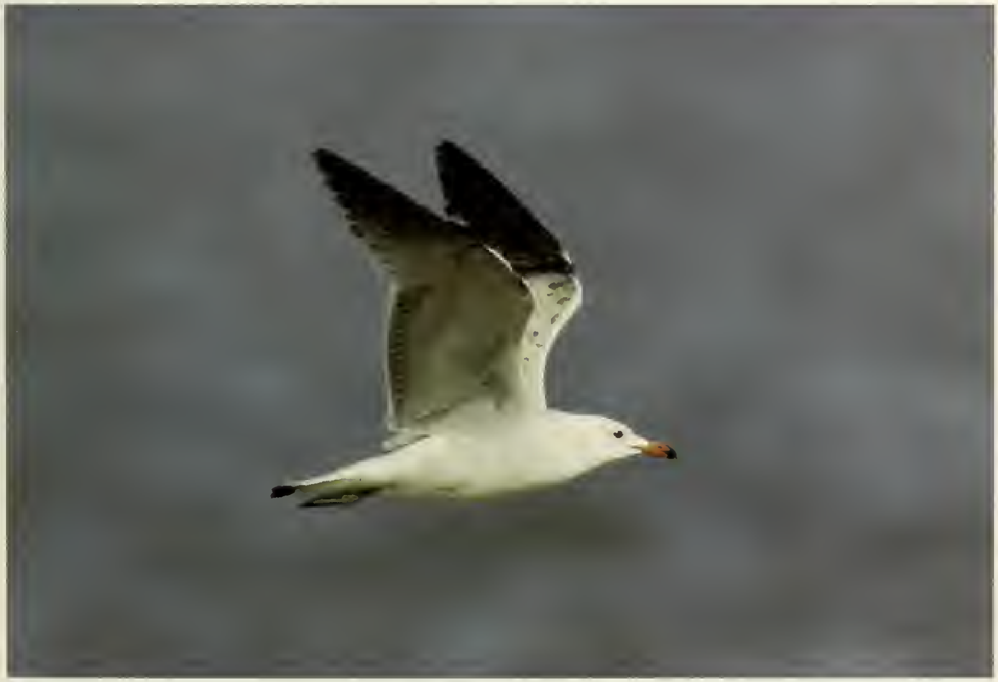
Yorkshire, West Fairburn Ings, first-winter/first-summer, 18th April to 1st May and 9th-13th May, photo (J. J. Gilroy *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 214).

(Breeds widely across N North America from W and C Alaska through Canada to James Bay. Winters locally on ice-free rivers and lakes in N USA, and S along both coasts of USA to Mexico and Caribbean.)

Audouin's Gull *Larus audouinii* (0, 0, 1)

Kent Dungeness, second-summer, 5th-7th May, photo (D. Walker *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plates 215 & 216; 97: plates 308, 309 & 342).

Though widely anticipated, the arrival on British shores of this delightfully elegant gull was, for many, one of the highlights of the year. Remarkably, photographic evidence suggests that the Kent bird was the same individual as that discovered four days earlier at Neeltje Jans, Zeeland, The Netherlands, where it was also a national 'first' (*Dutch Birding* 26: 237-239). Much to the chagrin of its would-be Dutch admirers, it lingered in Zeeland for no more than two hours before making a premature departure in a southerly direction, only to be sensationally relocated by the sharp-eyed observatory warden at Dungeness. Fortunately, the Kent coast proved more to its liking, and it remained long enough to attract an appreciative audience (see *Brit. Birds* 97: 537-541).



Nigel Blake

342. Second-summer Audouin's Gull *Larus audouinii*, Dungeness, Kent, May 2003.

As a breeding bird, Audouin's Gull is endemic to the Mediterranean basin, where its numbers have risen spectacularly from approximately 1,000 pairs in the early 1970s to more than 17,000 pairs in 1995 (Lambertini 1995, *Birding World* 8: 261-262). It is partly migratory and dispersive, the main wintering grounds lying in the western Mediterranean and along the Atlantic coast of northwest Africa, especially Morocco, where it is often encountered among flocks of Lesser Black-backed Gulls *L. fuscus* and 'Yellow-legged Gulls' *L. (c.) michahellis*. Despite the increasing population, extralimital records north of the Mediterranean region remain surprisingly rare.

(Breeds throughout Mediterranean basin from Spain E to Greece and Turkey, with majority breeding at Ebro Delta and Chafarinas Islands, Spain. Outside breeding season, most migrate to winter along the Atlantic seaboard of Africa, from Morocco to Senegal and Gambia.)

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus cachinnans*
Central Palearctic race *L. (c.) cachinnans* 'Caspian Gull' (0, 85, –)

1997 **Essex** East Tilbury, adult, 13th September (A. J. A. Dally).

1998 **Essex** East Tilbury, first-summer, 26th April (A. J. A. Dally).

1998 **Essex** East Tilbury, adult, 26th July (A. J. A. Dally).

1998 **Essex** Royal Docks (London), adult, 28th November, 31st December to 1st January 1999, returning 21st November to 31st December 1999, photo (A. J. A. Dally).

1998 **Essex** Barking Bay (London), adult, 5th December (A. J. A. Dally).

1998 **Leicestershire** Eyebrook Reservoir, third-winter, 31st October (J. Wright).

1999 **Derbyshire** Ogston Reservoir, adult, 9th November (M. F. Stoyle).

1999 **Leicestershire** Eyebrook Reservoir, adult, 16th September (J. Wright).

1999 **Northamptonshire** Welford Tip, first-winter, 7th December (J. Wright).

1999 **Suffolk** Blythburgh, at least 6th December, also in 2000, photo (B. J. Small).

A small number of claims dating from before 1st January 2000 (the cut-off date for review by BBRC) are still under consideration, and BBRC will continue to receive and publish records prior to this date. Claims that have not been accepted represent around 20% of the total assessed, a relatively high rejection rate, although, as we have stated previously (*Brit. Birds* 96: 577), assessment was carried out using strict criteria and many claims fell only just short of the required level of detail. The job of county records committees in assessing claims is not an easy one but, with an average of at least 20 per year during the late 1990s, this taxon occurs too frequently to come within BBRC's remit. Although regular (yet perhaps prone to annual fluctuations in numbers) in parts of southeast England, East Anglia and the East Midlands, 'Caspian Gull' remains an extremely good find in other areas. A paper addressing the identification and assessment of this taxon is in preparation, and will hopefully help the assessment at county level. Autumn and winter is clearly the prime time for finding these exotic Larids.

(Breeds from E Germany and Poland to Black Sea, E across steppes to SE Kazakhstan. Winters to S of breeding range, mainly from E Mediterranean to Persian Gulf. Being recorded with increasing frequency in W Europe outside breeding season.)

Ross's Gull *Rhodostethia rosea* (2, 81, 0)

1998 **Shetland** Gremista, Lerwick, presumed same, Loch of Tingwall; correct dates were 16th January to 22nd March and 28th April to 22nd May, respectively (*Brit. Birds* 92: 582).

(Locally common on tundra of NE Siberia, from Lena River E to at least Kolyma River. In Canada, rare and local in W Hudson Bay region, perhaps elsewhere. Siberian birds migrate E past Point Barrow, Alaska, in September to unknown wintering areas assumed to lie near edge of pack ice, perhaps in Bering Sea or N Pacific, S to N Japan.)

Gull-billed Tern *Sterna nilotica* (82, 217, 3)

Essex Shoeburyness, 5th July (S. Arlow, J. Wright).

Hampshire Titchfield Haven, 26th May (R. E. Innes, C. D. R. Jones); same, Chichester Harbour/ Hayling Bay, 27th-28th May (T. A. Lawman, D. Robertson per J. M. Clark). Also in West Sussex.

Shropshire Worfield, 11th June (A. Gaunt).

Sussex, West Littlehampton, 26th-27th May, photo (C. W. Glanfield). Same as Hampshire.

(Small population in N Germany and Denmark. Widespread though local in Spain, but colonies are isolated and small elsewhere in S Europe. To E, breeds discontinuously from Turkey and SW Russia through Kazakhstan, Mongolia and NW China, with an isolated population in NE China. European population winters in coastal W Africa, S to Gulf of Guinea. Asian populations winter from Persian Gulf to Indian subcontinent and SE Asia. Other races occur in Australia and the Americas.)

Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia* (28, 243, 1)

Northamptonshire Stanwick Gravel-pits, 16th-17th July, photo (S. P. Fisher *et al.*).

2002 Suffolk Lakenheath Flash, 26th-28th June (L. Woods *et al.*); same as Hockwold Washes, Norfolk, 26th-30th June (*Brit. Birds* 96: 580).

As in 2000, only one was recorded during the year. In terms of location and date, this was a typical sighting and constitutes the second record for this inland site, the last one being on 1st August 1998.

(Isolated and declining European population breeds on Baltic coasts of Estonia, Sweden and Finland to head of Gulf of Bothnia. To E, fragmented populations from Black Sea coast of Ukraine across steppe-lake region of C Asia to NW Mongolia and E China. European birds winter in W Africa to Gulf of Guinea, while Asian populations winter on coasts to S of breeding range. Other populations in Australia, S Africa and North America.)

Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri* (0, 19, 1)

Argyll Oban Bay and Loch Feochan, first-winter, 8th-11th January, photo (W. Jackson *et al.*).

2001 Orkney Tingwall and Eynhallow Sound area, adult, 24th-27th October (I. A. Dillon, E. J. Williams *et al.*).

(Breeds in C Canada, mid-west USA, and E coast USA from Maryland to Texas. Winters coastal S USA, S to Mexico.)

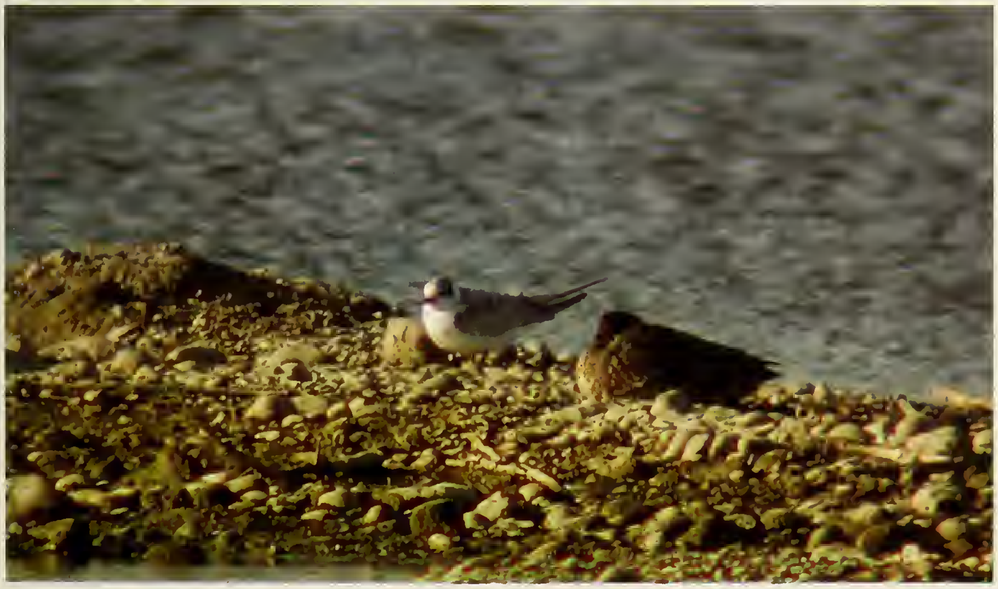
Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida* (24, 104, 3)

Kent Dungeness, 28th-29th May, photo (P. G. Akers *et al.*); first-winter, 26th-27th September, photo (P. G. Akers, D. Walker *et al.*) (plate 343).

Nottinghamshire Hallcroft Gravel-pits, 15th-24th June, photo (I. Cowgill *et al.*) (fig. 4, p. 586); presumed same as East Yorkshire below (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 276).

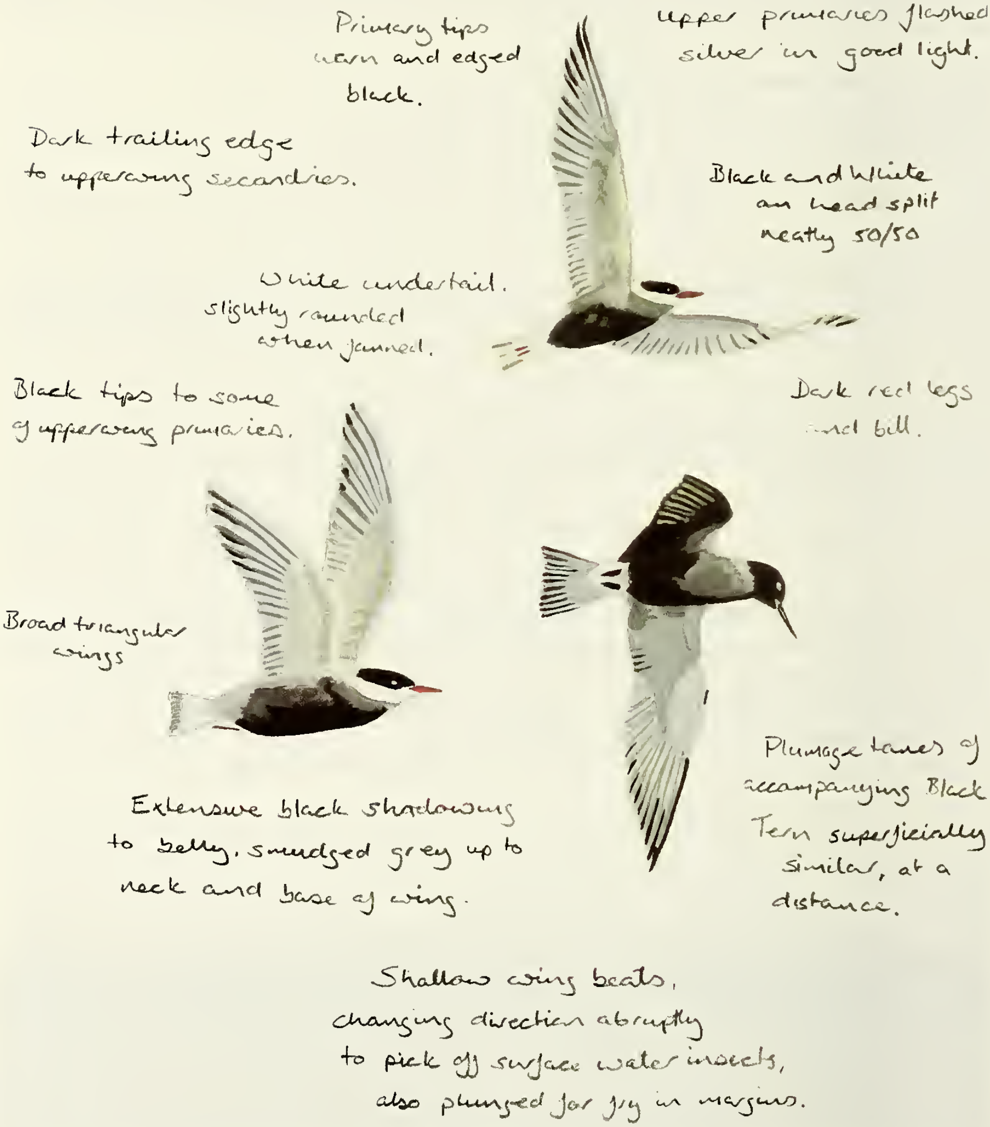
Yorkshire, East Tophill Low, 14th June, photo (D. G. Fairweather, M. G. Hodges); also in Nottinghamshire.

(Opportunistic and erratic breeder through S and E Europe, from Iberia to Poland. Numerous and widespread from N Black Sea E to W Kazakhstan, with Volga/Ural River complex holding most of European population. Winters in tropical W and C Africa and from Nile delta to E Africa. Other populations in Indian subcontinent, E Asia, S Africa and Australia.)



Dave Walker

343. First-winter Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*, Dungeness, Kent, September 2003.


Primary tips worn and edged black.
Upper primaries flashed silver in good light.
Dark trailing edge to upperwing secondaries.
Black and White on head split neatly 50/50
White undertail. slightly rounded when fanned.
Black tips to some of upperwing primaries.
Dark red legs and bill.
Broad triangular wings
Extensive black shadowing to belly, smudged grey up to neck and base of wing.
Plumage tones of accompanying Black Tern superficially similar, at a distance.
Shallow wing beats, changing direction abruptly to pick off surface water insects, also plunged for fry in margins.

Ian Cowgill

Fig. 4. Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*, Hallcroft Gravel-pits, Nottinghamshire, June 2003.

White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* (86, 724, 11)

Cheshire Hoylake, 13th July (J. E. Turner); also in Lancashire & North Merseyside below.

Clyde Barr Loch and Castle Semple Loch, second-summer, 26th-29th May, photo (W. Brock, J. Molloy *et al.*).

Lancashire & North Merseyside Seaforth, 14th-17th July, photo (S. J. White *et al.*); also in Cheshire. Conder Green, adult, 14th-24th August, photo (P. Woodruff *et al.*).

Lincolnshire Welland Bank Gravel-pits, 12th July (K. Durose *et al.*).

Norfolk Titchwell, adult, 31st July (R. Kimber *et al.*); same, Cley, 1st August (D. S. Honnor). Snettisham, juvenile/first-winter, 2nd-3rd October (J. Scott *et al.*).

Northumberland Hauxley, 9th June; same, East Chevington, 10th June intermittently until 14th August; same, Druridge Pools NR, 11th and 13th June, photo (J. Alexander, I. R. Douglas, A. D.

McLevy *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 277). Farne Islands, 27th June, photo (A. Ash *et al.*).
Northamptonshire Earl's Barton Gravel-pits, 27th July to 4th August (C. Adams *et al.*).
Orkney Loch of Tankerness, second-summer, 2nd-8th June, photo (K. E. Hague).
Yorkshire, East Pulfin Bog, adult, 31st July, photo (D. G. Hobson).
2002 Durham Whitburn, 10th July (P. Hogg, B. Unwin *et al.*).

(W limit of European range from Poland to Hungary, where local, with sporadic breeding to W. Breeds commonly from Belarus, W Russia and Ukraine E to S Siberia, N Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Russian Far East and NE China, but absent from large areas. Winters throughout sub-Saharan Africa, Indian subcontinent, SE Asia and N Australia.)

Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis* (2, 5, 1)

Caithness Hill of Ratter area, first-winter *S. o. meena*, 5th December to at least 24th March 2004, photo (N. Money *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 97: plate 28).
2002 Orkney Stromness, 20th November to 6th December (*Brit. Birds* 96: 581), to 20th.

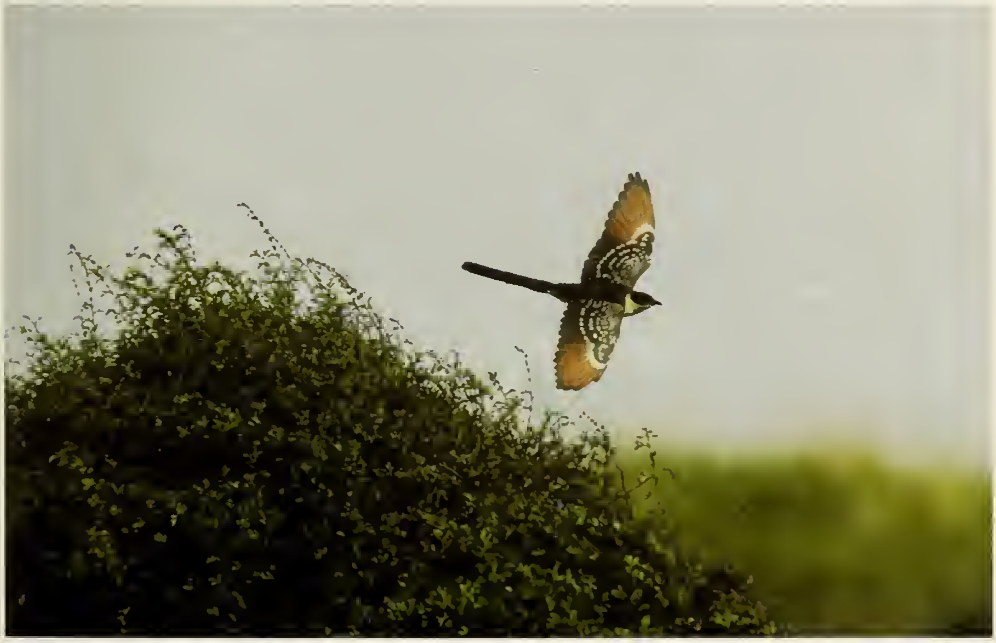
(Breeds from S Urals, E to Japan and S to Himalayas, C China and Taiwan. Northern populations migratory, wintering in SE Iran, the Indian subcontinent, and from S China to N Thailand and Indochina. *S. o. meena* is the westernmost race.)

Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius* (3, 36, 1)

Yorkshire, East Spurn, juvenile, 19th-31st July, trapped 27th, photo (P. Collins *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 313; 97: plate 344).

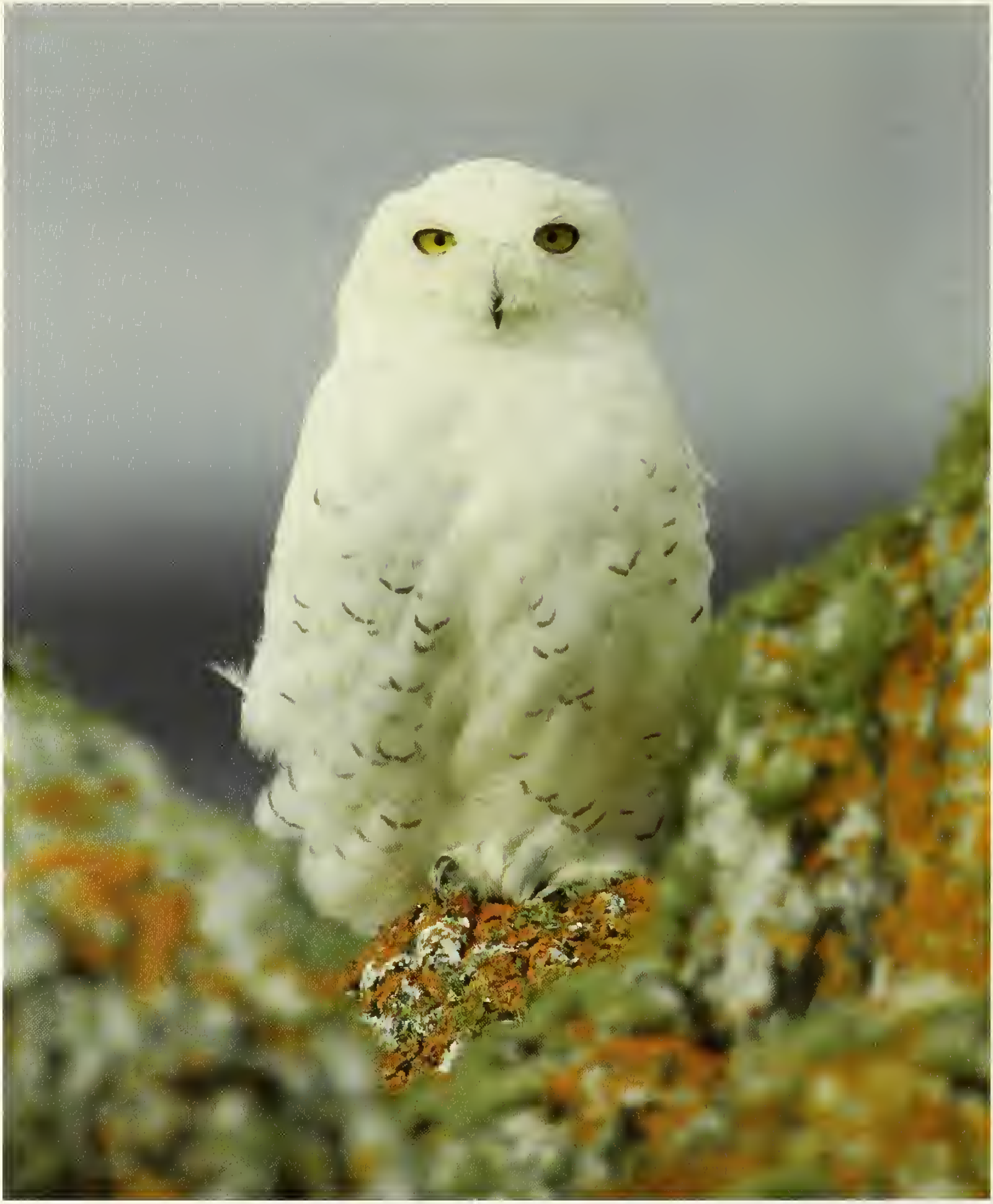
Spurn joins an elite group of localities, including Cley, Dawlish Warren, Dungeness and Sandwich Bay, which have recorded this species twice. July birds are by no means unprecedented and this bird becomes the sixth July record to date, all of which were along the east coast of England. The East Yorkshire bird's protracted stay was no doubt facilitated by a localised abundance of Garden Tiger *Arctia caja* caterpillars, which literally swarmed over Spurn Point throughout this period. During the course of its stay, the bird was found settled in the holding area of a Heligoland trap and duly became the first to be ringed in Britain. Although the population in Iberia and southern France is slowly increasing, there does not appear to have been any commensurate increase in British records so far.

(Common summer migrant to Spain, rare and local breeder in Portugal, S France and E to Greece. W Asian population uncommon, breeding discontinuously from C Turkey, Cyprus, Israel and Jordan to N Iraq and SW Iran. Palearctic breeders winter in sub-Saharan Africa but range uncertain owing to African populations there.)



Nigel Blake

344. Juvenile Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius*, Spurn, East Yorkshire, July 2003.


Nigel Blake

345. Snowy Owl *Bubo scandiacus*, North Uist, Outer Hebrides, August 2003.

Eurasian Scops Owl *Otus scops* (56, 27, 2)

Shetland Northdale, Unst, 23rd-25th May, photo (R. M. Holyoak, M. G. Pennington *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 248). Fair Isle, 30th July, trapped, photo (S. A. Boswell *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 314).

(Common summer migrant to N Africa and S Europe, from Iberia N to C France and E to Greece. Also breeds across Ukraine, S Russia and S Siberia to W Mongolia, Kazakhstan and Iran. Most winter in N equatorial Africa, but some remain in S Europe.)

Snowy Owl *Bubo scandiacus* (0, 157, 1)

Outer Hebrides Grenitote/Traigh Valley area, North Uist, 7th August to 24th October, same, Aird a' Mhorain, North Uist, 12th-16th December, photo (P. Prior-Pitt, A. Stevenson, N. Wilkinson *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 333; 97: plate 345).

2001 Caernarfonshire Bardsey, first-winter ♀, 13th April (S. D. Stansfield).

The Outer Hebrides have become the national hot-spot for this magnificent owl, with this popular individual being the eighth in the islands since 1992. The geographical spread of recent records in Britain & Ireland might suggest a Nearctic origin for at least some, but one which died on North Uist in 1992 had been ringed at Hordaland in Norway (*Birding Scotland* 6: 158).

(Occasionally breeds in N Scandinavia and Iceland, depending on availability of small mammals. Outside Europe, erratic circumpolar breeder across tundra and N islands of Arctic Russia, Siberia, Alaska, Canada and N Greenland. Most disperse S in winter, but some resident or nomadic if food available.)

Alpine Swift *Apus melba* (109, 434, 10)

Anglesey Fedw Fawr, 5th June (Mr & Mrs P. Delow).

Cornwall Hillbrook, 23rd April (C. Chan, J. J. Moore, B. Taggart).

Dorset Poole, 5th March (P. Robinson). Lodmoor, 28th April (G. Walbridge *et al.*). Abbotsbury, 3rd May (S. A. Groves *et al.*).

Essex Fairlop, 27th April (M. K. Dennis).

Kent Foreness, 8th-9th March (N. A. Driver *et al.*).

Norfolk Mundesley, 27th April (M. Fiszer, A. J. Kane). Holme and Hunstanton area, 27th April (P. & V. Merchant); presumed same as Mundesley above and Suffolk below.

Shetland Heilinabretta, Fetlar, 5th May (P. Bedall, P. R. French).

Suffolk Aldringham, 27th April (D. Thurlow); same, Dunwich Heath, 27th April (M. L. Cornish *et al.*); same, Minsmere/Sizewell, 27th April to 5th May (per D. F. Walsh).

Warwickshire Merevale, 3rd August (S. M. Hayes, G. J. Mant).

2002 Caernarfonshire Aberdaron, 25th March (S. Hugheston-Roberts *et al.*).

2002 Yorkshire, West Fairburn Ings, 5th October (J. Glendinning).

(Breeds discontinuously in NW Africa and throughout S Europe, N to C France and Switzerland, to Ukraine. To E, breeds locally through Turkey and Caucasus to Iran, Afghanistan and N Pakistan. Winter range unknown, but assumed to be in Afrotropics or W India where separation of local populations from northern migrants not possible.)

Little Swift *Apus affinis* (0, 17, 1)

Scilly St Mary's, 28th April, photo (R. L. Flood, N. Wheatley *et al.*) (plate 346).

2002 Lincolnshire Gibraltar Point, 25th June (K. M. Wilson).

(Isolated population in NW Africa, increasing and expanding in Morocco. Breeds locally and discontinuously in Middle East from Israel to SE Iran and N along Euphrates River to SE Turkey. Largely resident, but some Middle East populations migratory. Elsewhere, resident or dispersive throughout sub-Saharan Africa and Indian subcontinent to Sri Lanka.)

Bob Flood

346. Little Swift *Apus affinis* (left), St Mary's, Scilly, April 2003.

Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra* (0, 11, 0)

2002 **Orkney** North Ronaldsay, 10th-11th May (P. J. Donnelly *et al.*).

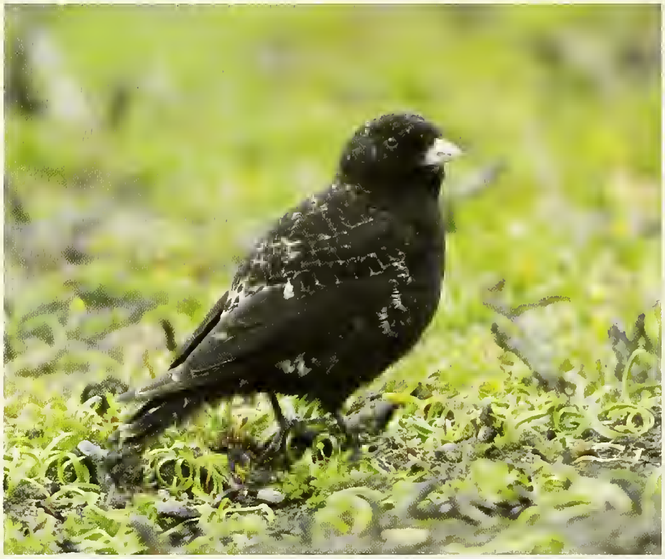
(Abundant on steppe grasslands of Iberia and Morocco, but uncommon and local throughout much of Mediterranean basin. To E, breeds in Ukraine, Turkey and SW Russia to Kazakhstan and Afghanistan. European and S Asian populations resident or nomadic, while N Asian populations disperse S of breeding range, to Persian Gulf coast of Iran.)

Black Lark *Melanocorypha yeltoniensis* (0, 1, 1)

Anglesey South Stack, ♂, 1st-8th June, photo (K. G. Croft, S. Rosser *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 249; 97: plate 347).

1984 **Yorkshire**, East Spurn, ♂, 27th April (the late N. A. Bell, A. Cruickshank, B. R. Spence).

The Anglesey Black Lark was, along with the aforementioned Audouin's Gull at Dungeness, surely one of the ornithological highlights of 2003. Since Black Lark was removed from the British List as part of the Hastings Rarities affair, it has been high on the list of most sought-after birds for many people. So it seems remarkable that we can include not one but two records in this report, with the 1984 Spurn bird now accepted by the BOURC as the first in Britain. The full story of this bird's struggle to gain admission to the British List will be published soon in *British Birds.* In short, a description from a completely independent observer came to light after publication of photographs of a bird in Sweden in the 1990s. What is perhaps more of a coincidence is that the Spurn bird was already in circulation around BBRC (and had been accepted by the eight voters who had reviewed it) by the time the Anglesey bird arrived.



Nigel Blake

347. Male Black Lark *Melanocorypha yeltoniensis*, South Stack, Anglesey, June 2003.

It is curious that all except one of the birds which have turned up in western Europe in the last 30 years have been males, yet males tend to be relatively sedentary while females move away from the breeding grounds in winter. Is it possible that some of these females are going undetected?

(Largely resident on grassy steppes of Central Asia from Lower Volga region of southeast Russia, E to northeast Kazakhstan. Outside breeding season, nomadic flocks remain within breeding range, some occasionally W to Ukraine.)

Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica* (5, 385, 40)

Bedfordshire Dunstable, 27th-28th April, photo (P. Trodd, A. Whitney *et al.*).

Cheshire Heswall, 20th-21st April (D. Horner, D. Wild *et al.*). Hurlstone Reservoir, two, 24th-25th April, photo (A. Green, M. Pennell, D. J. W. Taylor *et al.*).

Cleveland Seaton Common, 29th April (G. J. Lawlor).

Cornwall Sennen area, 13th-19th April (M. T. Elliott *et al.*).

Devon Prawle, date uncertain, May, photo (C. & P. Leigh). Beesands Ley, 1st June (P. Boulden, P. Sanders). Lundy, 12th September (R. Batch, R. & S. Campey).

Dorset Lodmoor, 25th-26th April (D. J. Chown, D. Croxon *et al.*).

Essex Hanningfield Reservoir, 28th April (D. L. Acfield *et al.*). Ardleigh, three, 2nd May (A. Lansdown).

Herefordshire Locality withheld, 24th April (C. Wells). Bodenham Lake, 25th April (P. & T. Downes).

Kent Wouldham, 26th April (I. E. H. Shephard). Dungeness, 26th April (K. & R. Kraaijeveld); 1st May, photo (P. G. Akers *et al.*).
Leicestershire Swithland Reservoir, 30th April to 1st May (A. J. Mackay *et al.*).
Lincolnshire Fishtoft, 27th April (S. Keightley). Gibraltar Point, four, 29th-30th April (T. Sykes, K. M. Wilson *et al.*); another, 2nd May (S. Evans, T. Sykes, K. M. Wilson *et al.*).
Orkney Birsay, 4th May, photo (H. & L. Leek).
Pembrokeshire Skokholm, first-winter, 21st October (G. & T. Thompson).
Scilly Tresco, 17th April (A. E. Blake *et al.*); same, St Martin's, St Mary's, 17th-18th (W. H. Wagstaff *et al.*). St Agnes, first-winter, 11th October, photo (Mr Jolliffe, D. Page *et al.*).
Shetland Bressay, 3rd June; same, Gott, 4th (P. Goddard *et al.* per P. V. Harvey).
Shropshire Priorslee Lake, Telford, 27th-28th April (A. Latham).
Suffolk Minsmere, 29th-30th April and 2nd May (R. Harvey *et al.*).
Surrey Beddington Sewage-farm, 28th April (A. Pickett *et al.*).
Sussex, East Arlington Reservoir, 26th April (J. Curson *et al.*); presumed same, plus another, 30th April to 4th May (I. T. Barnard, R. K. Haggar, M. Hawkins). Cuckmere Valley, 7th May (J. C. Parish).
Wight, Isle of Brading, 3rd-4th May (C. J. Meaney, G. R. Sparshott *et al.*).
Yorkshire, East Kilnsea and Spurn, 23rd April (A. A. Hutt *et al.*). Flamborough Head, 27th April (A. J. Booth, G. J. Etherington *et al.*).
2002 Buckinghamshire Furston Lake, Milton Keynes, 29th April (*Brit. Birds* 96: 583), finder/identifier was S. R. Nicholl and correct locality was Furzton Lake.
2002 Cornwall Hannafore, 9th November (G. D. Lewis).
2002 Durham Washington, 18th-19th April (A. Donnison).
2002 Hampshire Pitts Wood, New Forest, 10th July (M. Rafter).
2002 Yorkshire, East East Park, Hull, 2nd-23rd April (*Brit. Birds* 96: 584), finder was B. Jones.

(Widespread and locally common in NW Africa, Iberia, Balkans and Greece but uncommon in C Mediterranean. To E, breeds discontinuously in W and S Turkey and Middle East. Wintering area of European population unknown but assumed to lie in N equatorial Africa. Other populations breed in E Asia from S Siberia to S China and Japan, Indian subcontinent and locally in equatorial Africa.)

Blyth's Pipit *Anthus godlewskii* (1, 11, 0)

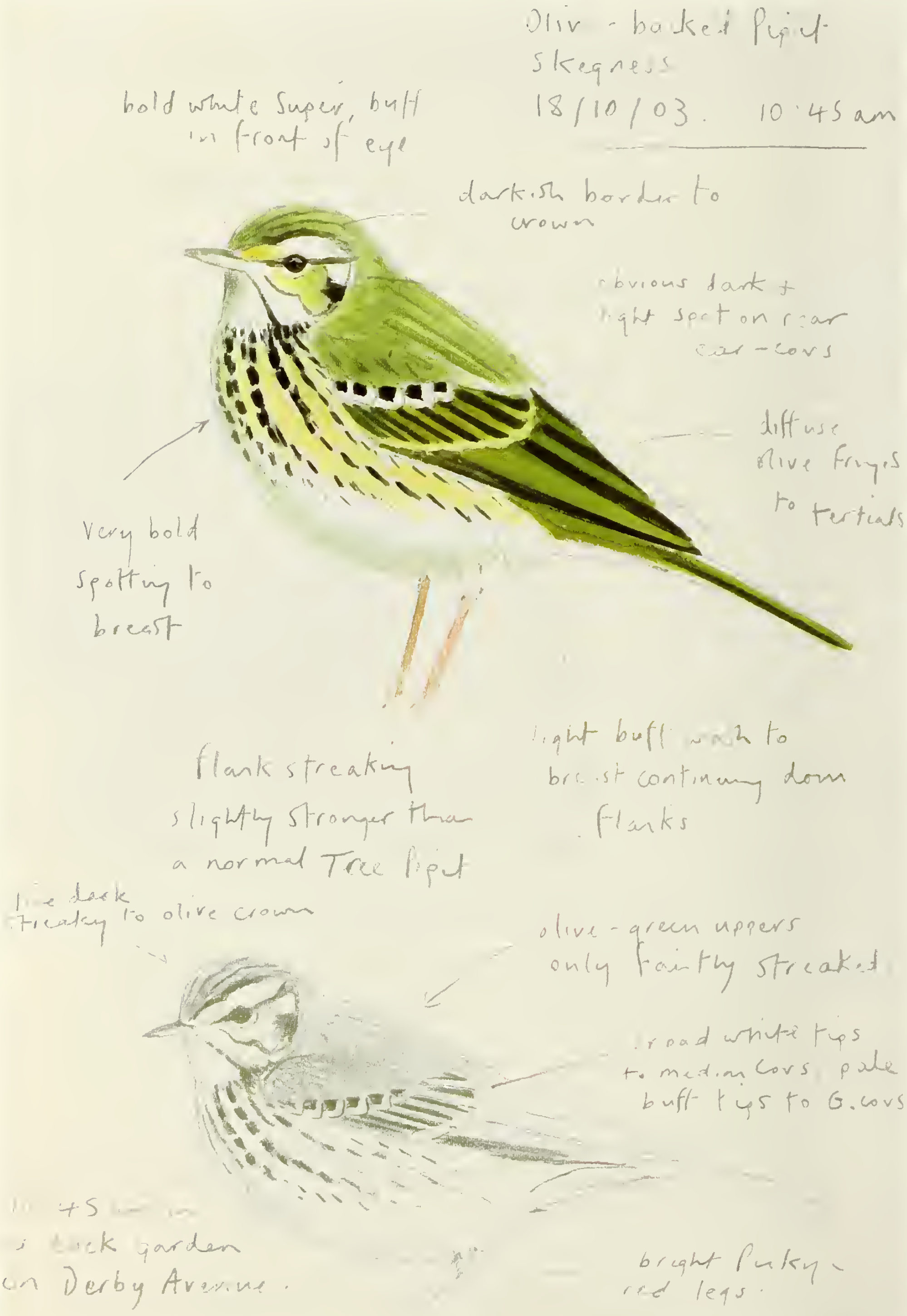
Nottinghamshire Gringley Carr, first-winter, since 28th December 2002, to 5th January (*Brit. Birds* 96: 584).

(Breeds from S Transbaikalia and N Mongolia to extreme NE China and S to Tibet. Winters locally throughout Indian subcontinent.)

Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni* (1, 249, 16)

Lincolnshire Skegness, 18th-20th October (K. Durose, D. M. Jenkins, J. Wright *et al.*) (fig. 5).
Norfolk Great Yarmouth cemetery, 18th-21st October, photo (J. Day, B. Stafford, H. Vaughan *et al.*).
Scilly St Mary's, 22nd-26th October (A. Beolans *et al.*). St Agnes, 27th-28th October (K. D. Shaw *et al.*).
Shetland Out Skerries, 29th September to 4th October, photo (M. J. McKee, C. Turner, T. Warrick *et al.*); 17th October (P. V. Harvey, J. D. Okill, P. Sclater *et al.*). Sumburgh, 12th October (T. R. Cleeves, P. V. Harvey, R. Riddington *et al.*). Norwick, Unst, 13th-18th October (M. A. Maher, M. G. Pennington *et al.*). Gord/Houbie, Fetlar, 14th-17th October (M. Smith, B. H. Thomason); another, 17th October (B. H. Thomason). Fair Isle, 23rd October to 6th November (A. Quinn, D. N. Shaw *et al.*); another, 24th October (C. A. Holt, S. J. Turner); first-winter, 3rd November, trapped, photo (A. J. Bull, D. N. Shaw).
Sussex, East Seaford Head, 30th October (J. Curson).
Yorkshire, East Spurn, 9th-10th November (J. Wozencroft *et al.*).
Yorkshire, North Filey, 19th October (J. Harwood *et al.*).
2001 Suffolk Hopton, 30th September (*Brit. Birds* 96: 585), previously published as Corton.
2002 Shetland Baltasound, Unst, 16th October (M. G. Pennington).

Another good showing, following several lean years in the late 1990s. Once again, a majority of the records came from Shetland, and it is not unusual for these islands to account for half or more of the annual total.


Olive-backed Pipit
Skegness
18/10/03. 10:45 am
bold white Super, buff in front of eye
darkish border to crown
obvious dark + light spot on rear ear-covs
diffuse olive fringes to tertials
very bold spotting to breast
flank streaking slightly stronger than a normal Tree Pipit
light buff wash to breast continuing down flanks
fine dark streaking to olive crown
olive-green uppers only faintly streaked
broad white tips to median covs, pale buff tips to G.covs
10.45 [illegible]
in back garden
on Derby Avenue.
bright pinky-red legs.

John Wright

Fig. 5. Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*, Skegness, Lincolnshire, October 2003.

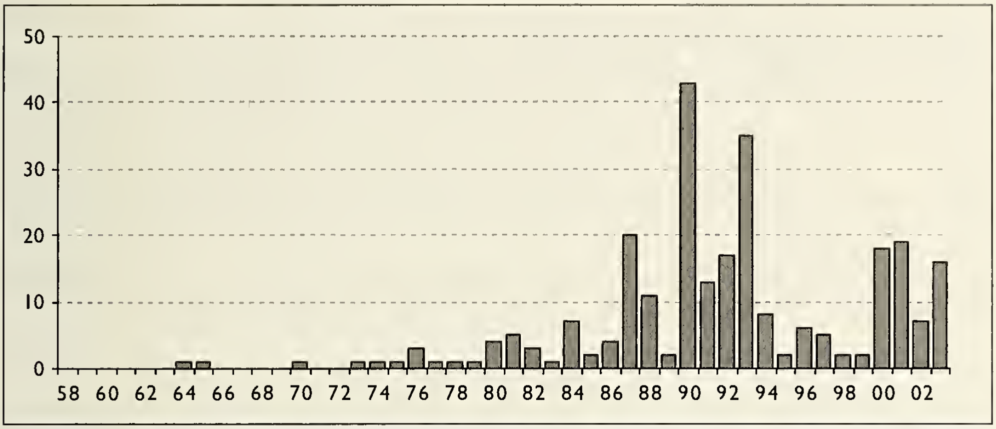


Fig. 6. Accepted records of Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni* in Britain, 1958-2003.

Olive-backed Pipit remains a top-class rarity on the south coast, where the one at Seaford Head was the first since singles in Devon in 1997 and in Cornwall in 2000. Even on the east coast of the mainland, it is still an extremely creditable find; the Spurn bird was only the third for this well-watched location and the first since 1987. Quite why numbers are so variable between years is unclear, but the average of 15.3 per year during 2000-03, compares favourably with only 3.4 during 1995-99.

(European range restricted to N Urals. Widespread across C and E Siberia to N China, Kamchatka, Kuril Islands and Japan. Winters widely across S China, Taiwan and throughout N and C parts of SE Asia. Population in Himalayas and mountains of west-central China winters throughout Indian subcontinent.)

Pechora Pipit *Anthus gustavi* (7, 59, 3)

Shetland Fair Isle, 5th-14th October, photo (P. A. Harris, D. N. Shaw *et al.*) (plate 348). Foula, 8th-15th October, trapped 12th, photo (T. P. Drew, M. A. Wilkinson *et al.*). Helendale, 14th-17th October (S. E. Duffield, S. J. Minton *et al.*).

(Breeds within narrow region of scrub-tundra and taiga of subarctic Eurasia, from Pechora region of NE Russia across Siberia to Chukotskiy Peninsula and Kamchatka. Migrates through E China and Taiwan to wintering areas in Philippines, N Borneo and N Sulawesi. Isolated population in NE China.)

Rebecca Nason

348. Pechora Pipit *Anthus gustavi*, Fair Isle, Shetland, October 2003.

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* (18, 395, 6)

Devon Skern, 3rd-4th May (R. G. Marshall *et al.*).
Dorset Weston, Portland, 24th September (G. Walbridge).
Norfolk Blakeney Point, 30th-31st May (S. J. Aspinall, B. A. E. Marr, R. F. Porter *et al.*). East Ruston South Fen, 21st November (A. J. Kane).
Scilly Tresco, 14th October (B. E. Wright).
Shetland Fair Isle, 16th-17th May (D. N. Shaw *et al.*).
2001 Suffolk Minsmere, 14th October (C. Dunn).
2002 Shetland Skaw, Unst, 21st October (M. G. & M. J. Pennington).

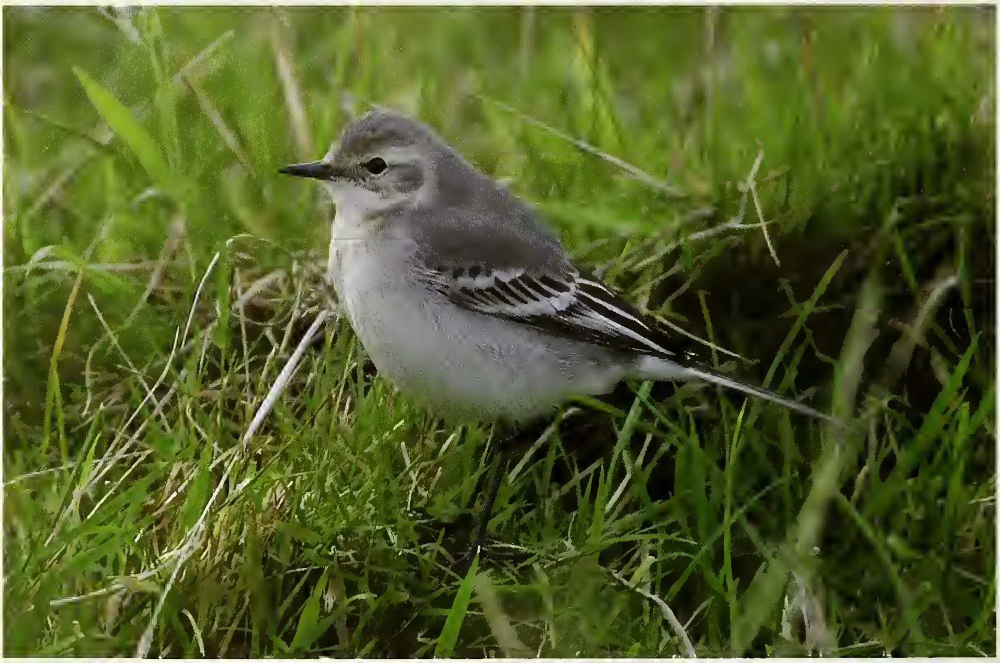
Six is a relatively poor return for a species which can boast over 400 records since 1958, and which is one of the commoner species assessed by BBRC.

Although we do not receive many fly-over, call-only, claims of Red-throated Pipit, these are among the most difficult of all records to assess. Identification of this species based simply on call is something that only thoroughly experienced observers should even consider – and even skilled birders can make a mistake. In such cases, we strongly urge that observers should describe the call in as much detail as possible. Given that the call lasts only about a second, details of length, tone, frequency, volume and anything else is invaluable, along with a description of the observer's past experience of this species and its calls.

(Breeds in Arctic Eurasia, from N Norway, Sweden and Finland E to Chukotskiy Peninsula and S to Kamchatka, with small numbers in W Alaska. Winters across N and C equatorial Africa, S China and SE Asia.)

Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* (2, 147, 13)

Hampshire Pennington Marsh, first-winter, 7th-10th September, photo (G. C. Stephenson *et al.*).
Northumberland Farne Islands, first-winter, 2nd October, photo (A. Ash, N. Dawson, D. Parnaby *et al.*).
Norfolk Kelling, first-winter, 23rd-25th August, photo (N. R. Stocks *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 334).
Orkney North Ronaldsay, first-winter, 28th September to 11th October, trapped 28th (A. E. Duncan, J. Ginnever *et al.*).
Shetland Quendale, first-winter, 3rd-9th September, photo, another, 5th-8th (G. J. Fitchett, P. V. Harvey, R. Riddington *et al.*). Loch of Spiggie, juvenile/first-winter, 18th-22nd September, photo (R. Riddington *et al.*). Out Skerries, juvenile/first-winter, 6th-7th September (P. R. Gordon). Fair Isle, first-winter, 7th September, photo (R. J. Nason, C. Round *et al.*); first-winter, 20th September (D. N. Shaw *et al.*); first-winter, 29th-30th September, photo (H. R. Harrop, J. P. Hunt *et al.*) (plate 349). Foula, first-winter, 4th-5th October, presumed same, 9th-11th (T. P. Drew, M. A. Wilkinson *et al.*).
Yorkshire, North Filey, first-winter, 21st September, photo (J. Harwood, F. X. Moffatt, A. Norris *et al.*).
2000 Shetland Foula, age uncertain, 23rd September (J. M. & T. P. Drew *et al.*).
2001 Outer Hebrides Callernish, North Uist, first-winter, 31st August (B. Rabbitts, A. Stevenson).
2002 Cornwall Marazion, first-summer ♂, 16th-19th May, photo (A. Swash, K. E. Vinicombe, J. Walters *et al.*).


Hugh Harrop

349. First-winter Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*, Fair Isle, Shetland, September 2003.

(Nominate race breeds in N Russia, from E Kola and Kanin peninsula across N Siberia to Taimyr Peninsula and S to C Siberia. Range of C Asian *M. c. werae* expanded W during 20th century; small numbers now breed regularly in Belarus, Baltic countries and occasionally S Finland; otherwise from Ukraine and S Russia, E across N Kazakhstan and Mongolia to N China. Another race breeds in S Central Asia. Winters throughout Indian subcontinent, S China and SE Asia to peninsular Thailand.)

Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia* (2, 145, 4)

Lincolnshire Gibraltar Point, first-summer ♂, in song, 19th-26th May, trapped 23rd, photo (M. J. Grantham, T. Sykes, K. M. Wilson *et al.*).

Norfolk Blakeney Point, 16th-17th May (A. Boughtflower, J. R. McCallum, D. Wood *et al.*).

Shetland Fair Isle, first-summer, 25th-26th May, trapped 26th, photo (D. N. Shaw *et al.*). Foula, first-summer, 29th May to 1st June, trapped 30th May, 1st June (D. & G. Atherton, A. R. Mainwood, S. C. Votier).

2002 **Fife** Isle of May, trapped 10th May (*Brit. Birds* 96: 587), to 12th (per M. Holling).

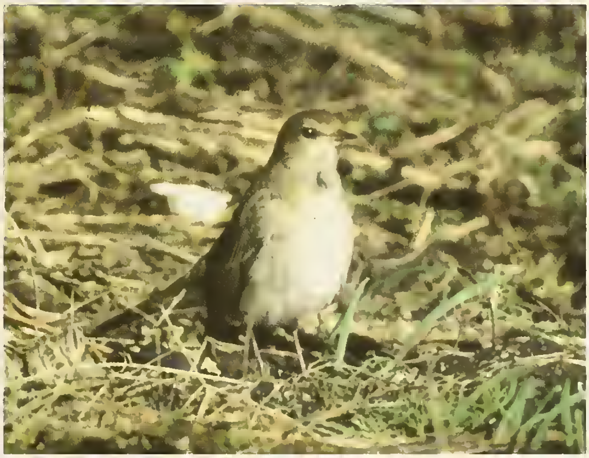
(Widespread throughout E Europe with dramatic population increase in 20th century. Range still expanding NW into W Norway, and locally abundant in S Scandinavia and Baltic countries. C European range from Denmark SE to Romania and Ukraine, and through temperate European Russia to S Siberia. Winters E Africa, from S Kenya to Zimbabwe.)

Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* Central Asian race *L. m. hafizi* (0, 3, 0)

1987 **Scilly** St Agnes, 23rd October, photo (C. Bradshaw, A. R. Dean, P. A. Dukes *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 97: plates 313 & 350).

This individual has now been accepted as being of the central Asian race *hafizi*, largely owing to the detail visible on photographs of the bird. Because both a Booted Warbler *Hippolais caligata* and Britain's first 'Two-barred Greenish Warbler' *Phylloscopus trochiloides plumbeitarsus* were discovered on St Agnes at the same time, not a great deal of attention was paid to this bird and few notes were taken, although all observers at the time commented on how distinctive it looked.

The first-named observer, who has no pretence of being the finder, reacquainted himself with this race in Kazakhstan in 2002 and finally realised that the photos actually showed all the characteristics that could be seen on birds in the field. These include a larger and longer-tailed appearance than the nominate race; a cold, sandy-grey mantle contrasting with a rufous tail; a distinct pale fore-supercilium; and a dark cheek-patch. The closed wing shows clear pale edges to the tertials and pale tips to the greater coverts, forming a distinct wing-bar, which is always obvious on *hafizi* in both spring and autumn, but can be matched by some first-years of the nominate race in autumn.


Colin Bradshaw

350. Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*, of central Asian race *hafizi*, St Agnes, Scilly, October 1987.

The two other records of *hafizi* Common Nightingale in Britain were on Fair Isle, Shetland (found dead on 30th October 1971), and at Spurn, East Yorkshire, on 6th-14th October 1991 (*Brit. Birds* 94: 485-486).

(This distinctive form breeds widely throughout C Asia from Aral Sea E through Kazakhstan to W China. Winters coastal E Africa from Kenya to Tanzania.)

Siberian Rubythroat *Luscinia calliope* (0, 3, 1)

Shetland Fair Isle, first-winter ♀, 17th-19th October, photo (A. J. Bull *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 406).

This, the fourth British record and the second for Fair Isle, follows hot on the heels of the previous two – in Dorset in 1997 and on mainland Shetland in 2001. It is tempting to suggest that this modest surge in records is a result of an increasing population size, or westward expansion of the breeding range, although there is no documented evidence for either. Many eastern vagrants are known to be expanding back westwards following range contraction during the last glaciation (Newton 2003, *The Speciation and Biogeography of Birds*, Academic Press). This individual came as something of a relief to Shetland-based observers, as the individual in 2001 was found dead. Imagine the surprise and delight on the faces of those who travelled north to Fair Isle to see a Savannah Sparrow *Passerculus sandwichensis* and discovered that this was awaiting them too! All four British records have occurred between 9th and 25th October.

(Occurs throughout Siberia from Ob River E to Anadyr and Kamchatka, with small numbers to European foothills of Urals in W. S limit reaches N Mongolia, Ussuriland, NE Hokkaido and NE China, with isolated population on E slopes of Tibetan plateau. Winters from Nepal E through Himalayan foothills to NE India, Burma and N Indochina to C Thailand, S China and Taiwan.)

Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus* (3, 26, 4)

Fife Crail, ♀ or first-winter, 15th-17th October, photo (C. Andrews, R. Armstrong *et al.*).
Norfolk Caister-on-Sea, ♀ or first-winter, 27th October (A. Grieve).
Shetland Funzie, Fetlar, ♀ or first-winter, 28th September (P. Crockett, I. Gordon). Fair Isle, ♀ or first-winter, 16th October (R. J. Curtis).

The pattern referred to in last year's report – of a long period with few records, followed by a perceptible surge in records over the past decade or so – was reinforced by the four in 2003, as shown in fig. 7.

(Tiny population persists in NE Finland but main range in cool temperate forests of N Eurasia from E Russia and Siberia to Kamchatka, N Japan and NE China. Winters S China, Taiwan and S Japan, through SE Asia to N peninsular Thailand.)

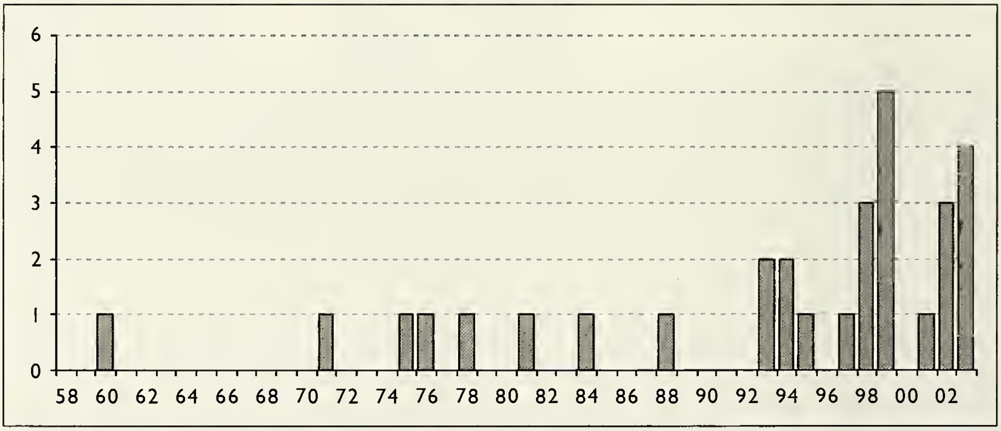


Fig. 7. Accepted records of Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus* in Britain, 1958-2003.

Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquatus*
Eastern race *S. t. maurus*, 'Siberian Stonechat' (1, 297, 7)

Dorset Weston, Portland, ♀ or first-winter, 13th October (J. A. Lucas).
Norfolk Scolt Head, ♂, 17th May (N. M. Lawton, N. Williams); ♀ or first-winter, 11th October (N. M. Lawton, N. Williams). Titchwell, first-winter ♂, 24th-25th October, photo (J. A. Rowlands *et al.*).
Northeast Scotland Cruden Bay, first-winter ♂, 1st November (P. A. A. Baxter, C. N. Gibbins *et al.*).
Suffolk Thorpeness, ♀ or first-winter, 14th September (C. A. Holt, D. de Palacio, J. Zantboer *et al.*).
Wiltshire Whiteparish, ♀ or first-winter, 13th October (P. Combridge).

1995 **Shetland** Skaw, Unst, ♀ or first-winter, 14th October, published as 1994 in error (*Brit. Birds* 90: 496) (*The Birds of Shetland*, 2004).

2002 **Shetland** Loch of Hillwell, ♀ or first-winter, 31st October, photo (A. & G. J. Fitchett, P. R. French *et al.*).

Following the review of all records of 'Siberian Stonechats' in spring, discussed in the 2002 BBRC Report (*Brit. Birds* 96: 588-589), most have, in fact, proven to be acceptable (see below). This, perhaps, was something of a surprise considering the much greater understanding of the variable features of continental Common Stonechats (of the race *rubicola*) that we possess today. Many descriptions were of such high quality that features including the extensive white rump and uppertail-coverts, the extent of white on the neck, etc. were noted, and have proved again the value of the BBRC archives.

Following this review, it was good to receive a claim of a spring male; the bird on Scolt Head, Norfolk, was the first in spring since 2000 and was critically and thoroughly examined. It showed all the classic features we now associate with spring 'Siberian Stonechat', and we feel that the time and effort spent researching and establishing the criteria by which spring birds can be assessed was justified, and well worthwhile.

The following records are regarded as still acceptable:

1972 **Norfolk** Cley, ♂, 6th May (*Brit. Birds* 69: 361; 73: 519).

1978 **East Yorkshire** Flamborough Head, ♂, 1st May (*Brit. Birds* 72: 533); ♂, 25th May (*Brit. Birds* 72: 533).

1978 **Lincolnshire** Donna Nook, ♂, 23rd May (*Brit. Birds* 72: 533).

1985 **Cleveland** Hartlepool, ♂, 13th-14th May, photo, found dead on 15th (*Brit. Birds* 79: 569).

1985 **East Yorkshire** Spurn, ♀, 5th-10th May, trapped 6th, photo (*Brit. Birds* 79: 569).

1990 **Shetland** Fair Isle, first-summer ♂, 28th-30th April, trapped 28th (*Brit. Birds* 84: 482).

1992 **Norfolk** Burnham Norton, ♂, 6th May (*Brit. Birds* 88: 534); Holme, ♂, 7th-8th June (*Brit. Birds* 88: 534); Cromer, ♂, 8th June (*Brit. Birds* 88: 534).

1993 **Northeast Scotland** Near Banchory, ♂, 1st-24th June, photo (*Brit. Birds* 88: 534).

1993 **North Yorkshire** Whitby, ♂, 10th-13th May, photo (*Brit. Birds* 91: 501).

1993 **Scilly** St Agnes, ♂, 13th-15th May (*Brit. Birds* 88: 534).

1994 **Shetland** Fair Isle, ♂, 8th-9th May (*Brit. Birds* 88: 531).

1995 **Shetland** Fetlar, ♀, 9th-12th May (*Brit. Birds* 90: 496).

1995 **North Yorkshire** Filey, first-summer ♂, 30th April to 4th May, trapped 2nd May, photo (*Brit. Birds* 89: 515).

1996 **North Yorkshire** Filey, ♂, 6th-7th May, trapped 7th May, photo (*Brit. Birds* 90: 495).

1997 **Norfolk** Blakeney Point, first-summer ♂, 21st-23rd May (*Brit. Birds* 91: 501).

1998 **Norfolk** Mundesley, first-summer ♂, 4th May (*Brit. Birds* 92: 591).

The following records are no longer regarded as acceptable:

1985 **Fife** Fife Ness, ♀, 20th May (*Brit. Birds* 79: 569).

1990 **East Yorkshire** Flamborough Head, ♂, 21st April (*Brit. Birds* 85: 536).

1996 **Norfolk** Holme, ♂, 18th May, photo (*Brit. Birds* 91: 502).

2000 **Shetland** Fair Isle, ♂, 16th May (*Brit. Birds* 94: 486).

The following record is still under consideration:

1990 **East Yorkshire** Flamborough Head, ♂, 7th May (*Brit. Birds* 85: 536).

(Breeds widely across N Asia from N Urals S to N Caspian Sea, Mongolia and N China, E to Kolyma basin, Okhotsk coast and N Japan. Winters from N Indian subcontinent to S China and SE Asia.)

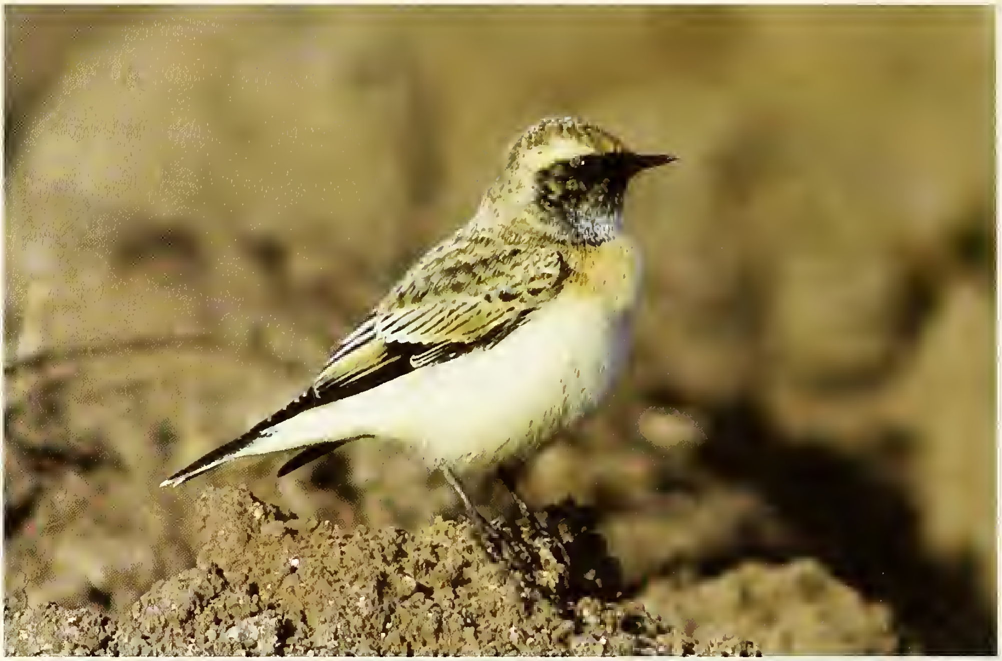
Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka* (3, 42, 4)

Norfolk Waxham, first-winter ♂, 23rd-26th October, photo (J. V. Bhalerao, D. J. Holman, B. W. Jarvis *et al.*). Paston, first-winter ♀, 31st October to 1st November, photo (R. Cobbold, M. Fiszer, A. J. Kane *et al.*).

Northeast Scotland Collieston, first-winter ♂, 18th-21st October, photo (P. S. Crockett *et al.*).

Scilly St Mary's, first-winter ♂, 15th-17th October, photo (K. Button *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 407; 97: plate 351).

2002 **Orkney** North Ronaldsay, ♂, 13th-27th October, photo (P. J. Donnelly *et al.*).



Steve Young/Birdwatch

351. First-winter male Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*, St Mary's, Scilly, October 2003.

Now an almost expected annual rarity from mid October through to November, with an average of 2.2 records per annum over the past ten years. In fact, 1995 has been the only blank year since 1985, prior to which there had been only nine individuals recorded in Britain. The four in 2003 (an annual total bettered only by the five in 1991, but equalled in 1994 and 1997) are typical in terms of date and location, and maintain the significant east-coast bias. The belated acceptance of the 2002 North Ronaldsay bird relates to a different individual from the wheatear mentioned in last year's report under Black-eared Wheatear *O. hispanica* (*Brit. Birds* 96: 590). Those comments, relating to the difficulties of separating some late-autumn individuals from Black-eared Wheatear of the eastern race *melanoleuca*, were emphasised again this year by a belated claim from Deerness, Orkney, in 1999, for what was clearly either a Pied or Black-eared Wheatear but, on the basis of the evidence provided, could not be assigned to either species with certainty.

(European range centred on Black Sea, reaching E Romania and Bulgaria. To E, small numbers in S and E Ukraine, but occurs widely across S Russia, S Siberia, Kazakhstan and Mongolia to N China, E to Gulf of Bohai. Winters in NE and E Africa, and SW Arabian Peninsula.)

Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica* (15, 43, 0)

1965 **Norfolk** Salthouse, ♂, 30th August to 14th September 1965 (*Brit. Birds* 59: 293). Previously unassigned to subspecies; was *hispanica*, probably adult.

1970 **Caernarfonshire** Bardsey, ♂, 18th April (*Brit. Birds* 64: 358). Previously unassigned, was *hispanica.*

1971 **Cornwall** Porthgwarra, 1st-5th October (*Brit. Birds* 65: 341). Previously accepted as two individuals (second from 2nd-5th October), now accepted as one only, considered unsafe to attribute to race.

Occasional blank years, like 2003, are to be expected for a species that has averaged a shade under one per year since 1958. The initial results of a review into subspecific identification were presented in the last report (*Brit. Birds* 96: 589-590). Including the latest decisions (above), nine previously unassigned birds have now been confirmed either as *melanoleuca* (three) or *hispanica* (six), and all of these nine were males. Furthermore, the racial provenance of three records previously assigned to race is now considered unsafe.

Precise details of the colour on both the mantle and the crown, the exact size and shape of the black head-markings on males, and careful ageing are all valuable clues when attempting to attribute individuals to subspecies. It is a testament to the observational and artistic skills of the late Richard Richardson that the 1965 Salthouse bird was duly confirmed as a *hispanica*; the discovery of his colour painting of the bird proved conclusive. Females and immatures are the most difficult to deal with, and spring birds, especially some first-summers, are more difficult than those in fresh autumn plumage.

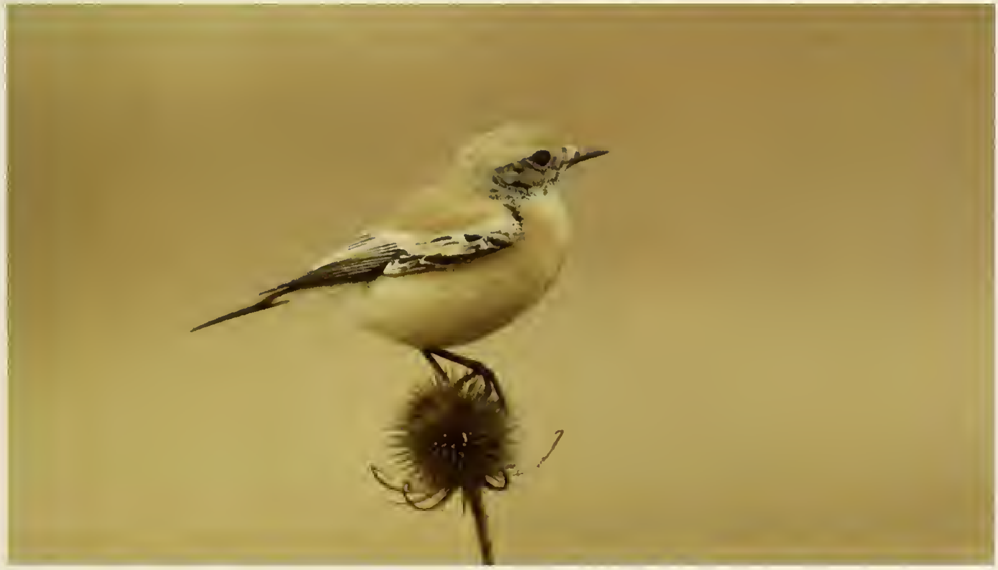
(Breeds Mediterranean basin; nominate form in NW Africa and Iberia, E to France and N Italy; eastern form, *O. h. melanoleuca*, from S Italy to Greece, and SW Asia from Turkey to S Caucasus, S to Israel and SW Iran. Winters widely across N tropical Africa from Senegal and N Nigeria to Ethiopia and Eritrea.)

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti* (11, 66, 9)

Devon Lundy, first-winter ♂, 26th October, trapped, photo (A. M. Taylor, R. J. Taylor, J. Walsh *et al.*).
Fife Kilminning, ♀, 10th-15th November, photo (A. Whitehouse *et al.*).
Kent Dungeness, ♀, 16th November, photo (P. G. Akers *et al.*). Reculver, first-winter ♂, 27th November to 5th December, photo (R. Dubbins, B. Poulter *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 97: plates 29 & 352).
Norfolk Burnham Overy Staithe, ♂, age uncertain, 9th-10th November (P. Clement *et al.*). Blakeney Point, first-winter ♂, 9th-10th November, photo (M. Woodcock *et al.*).
Northeast Scotland Girdleness, ♀, 12th-15th November, photo (P. S. Crockett, I. Gordon *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 97: plate 56).
Pembrokeshire Skokholm, ♀, 13th November (G. Thompson).
Sussex, East Climping, first-winter ♂, 9th-10th November, photo (P. M. A. & R. Gill *et al.*).

Any wheatear in Britain from late October into December is worth a second look, and Desert Wheatear remains a top-class find. The autumn of 2003 was a good one for this species, the nine records bettered only by the remarkable 17 in 1997 (and at least one record, from Shetland, remains under consideration). Eight of those listed above arrived between 9th and 27th November, two of these on the east coast of Scotland, two in north Norfolk, and three in Kent or East Sussex. The most likely origins of these birds are from Central Asia, although Naylor (1996) suggests that a number of old records are assigned to the North African race *homochroa*. Although one trapped on the island of Formentera, Spain, on 29th December 2003 was assigned to *homochroa*, it may be that a review of those individuals which have been identified to race, and indeed those adult males which have not, is overdue.

The Committee has attempted to determine the ages of the individuals from the information submitted, but has found the ageing of some, especially females, difficult. Although most are likely to be first-winter birds, the features by which ageing can be made (the fringing on the primary coverts, contrast between new and old greater coverts) are not always easy to see, even in well-photographed birds.


Nigel Blake

352. First-winter male Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*, Reculver, Kent, November 2003.

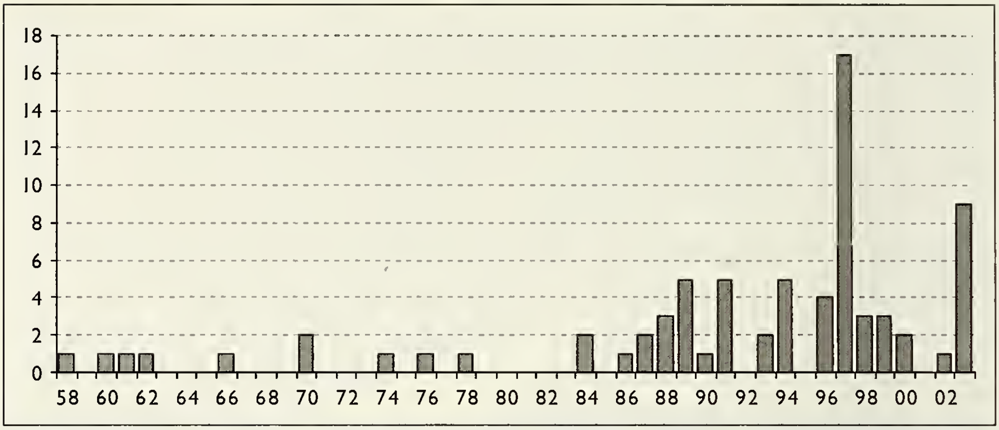


Fig. 8. Before 1983, Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti* was an extreme rarity in Britain, with just ten records since 1958 (and 11 before that). Since the mid 1980s, numbers have increased steadily, with 65 records since 1983, and it is now considered one of our more regular rarities. This increase may, in part, be due to the increasing popularity of birding, although there does appear to have been a fundamental change in the numbers reaching Europe. As this graph shows, however, there are still some blank years, and favourable weather conditions in late October and into November appear essential to its appearance in Britain.

It may well be that females cannot be reliably aged in the field, and while males are a little easier, some can still prove to be difficult.

(Breeds widely but discontinuously across arid and desert regions of N Africa from Morocco to Middle East, N to S Caucasus, and across C Asia from C Iran and N Pakistan to Mongolia and N China. Some N African birds resident, but many winter in Sahara and Sahel region of N Africa from Mauritania E to Ethiopia and Somalia. Asian breeders winter from Arabian Peninsula to NW India.)

White's Thrush *Zoothera dauma* (31, 25, 2)

Orkney North Ronaldsay, first-winter, 17th-19th October, trapped 17th, photo (P. Doyle, N. Gates, R. McGregor) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 408).

Shetland Scatness, hit window, caught and released, 28th September, photo (J. B. Bell, J. Robson *et al.*).

1962 Cornwall Bude, 1st-2nd January (F. E. Carter).

(Palearctic race *Z. d. aurea* widespread in C and S Siberia from Yenisey River to Ussuriland, S to N Mongolia, extreme NE China, Korean Peninsula and Japan. Small (isolated?) population extends W to foothills of European Urals. Winters widely throughout S China, Taiwan and S Japan to Indochina and C Thailand. Nominate race resident or altitudinal migrant in Himalayas, SW China and Taiwan.)

Micky Maher

353. First-winter Swainson's Thrush *Catharus ustulatus*, Sandwick, Unst, September 2003.

Swainson's Thrush *Catharus ustulatus* (0, 20, 3)

Scilly Bryher, 21st October, photo (M. Lawson *et al.*).

Shetland Sandwick, Unst, first-winter, 27th-30th September, photo (M. G. & M. J. Pennington *et al.*) (plate 353). Burrafirth, Unst, first-winter, 15th October, photo (M. A. Maher, M. G. & M. J. Pennington *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 409).

Transatlantic vagrancy patterns of *Catharus* thrushes are complex and difficult to interpret. Even though Swainson's is an early migrant through North America, there seems little difference in the timing of arrivals in Britain of this species compared with Grey-cheeked Thrush *C. minimus*. Moreover, there seems little correlation in the 'arrival years' of the two species in Britain. Three Swainson's were recorded in 1979, 1987, 1990 and 2003, with two in 2000; corresponding totals for Grey-cheeked were 1, 0, 3, 2 and 0. The two outstanding years for Grey-cheeked in recent years were 1986 with 12, and 1976 with five; corresponding totals for Swainson's were 0 and 1. From the mid 1970s to the early 1990s, these two arrivals, plus the three birds in both 1990 and 1991, made it seem that Grey-cheeked Thrush was somewhat less rare than Swainson's. Since 1991, however, the latter has held the upper hand, with a cumulative total of eight Swainson's but only six Grey-cheeked.

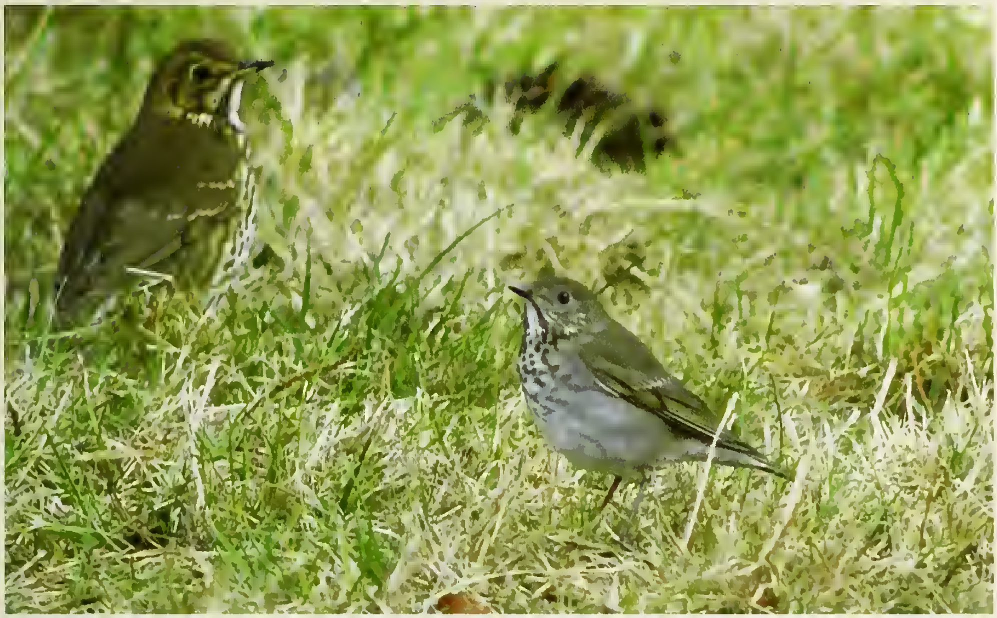
(Breeds across S Alaska and Canada to S Labrador and Newfoundland, generally to S of range of Grey-cheeked Thrush *C. minimus*, S to northern California, New Mexico, Great Lakes and West Virginia. Migrates across eastern USA to winter from Mexico S to NW Argentina.)

Grey-cheeked Thrush *Catharus minimus* (1, 41, 2)

Scilly Tresco, 11th-18th October, photo (R. Barratt, A. J. Livett, H. Price *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 410; 97: plate 354).

Shetland Foula, first-winter, 27th-30th September, trapped 27th, photo (A. R. Mainwood *et al.*).

(Breeds extreme NE Siberia E throughout Alaska and N Canada to Labrador and Newfoundland. Migrates across E USA to winter in N South America.)



Steve Young/Birdwatch

354. Grey-cheeked Thrush *Catharus minimus* (right) and Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*, Tresco, Scilly, October 2003.

Dark-throated Thrush *Turdus ruficollis* (3, 48, 2)

Shetland Foula, first-winter ♂, *T. r. atrogularis*, 9th-18th October, photo (A. R. Mainwood *et al.*). Busta, Brae, ♀, age uncertain, *T. r. atrogularis*, 16th October (M. S. Chapman, A. Graham).

There is known to be some limited intergradation between the red-throated (*T. r. ruficollis*) and black-throated (*T. r. atrogularis*) forms of Dark-throated Thrush, and recently the Dutch Rarities Committee (CDNA) received a record of a 'Black-throated Thrush' which 'on some photographs, ... seemed to show some rufous in the outer tail feathers' (*Dutch Birding* 25: 375). Nonetheless, CDNA considered that this was not sufficiently convincing to label the bird as a probable intergrade with 'Red-throated Thrush'. There are now 52 British records of Black-throated Thrush, compared with just a single one of Red-throated Thrush (in Essex in 1994), so we will continue to accept all records of Dark-throated Thrush as black-throated, even those which might not be seen well enough to exclude red in the tail with certainty, unless there is clear evidence that the bird is a Red-throated Thrush.

(Western, black-throated form *T. r. atrogularis* breeds in C and N Urals, E across SW Siberia and E Kazakhstan, to NW China. Winters Iraq to N India, E through Himalayan foothills to Bhutan. Nominate red-throated form breeds to E, in C Siberia, wintering in E Himalayas and S fringe of Tibetan plateau from Nepal to SW China, and N to NE China.)

American Robin *Turdus migratorius* (3, 16, 2)

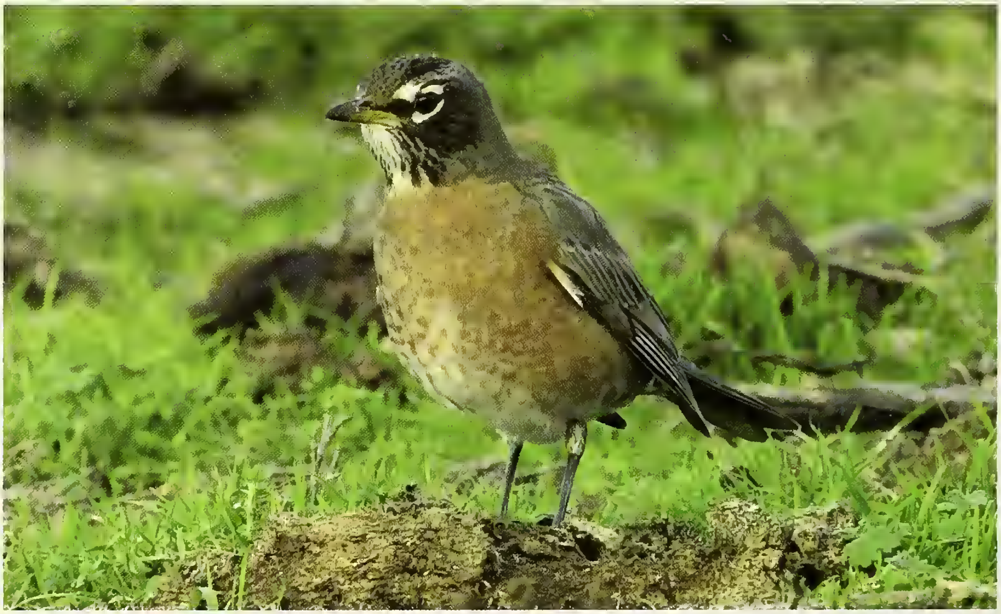
Caernarfonshire Bardsey, age/sex uncertain, 11th-12th November, probably since 9th, photo (D. Barden, E. Bowler, S. D. Stansfield *et al.*).

Cornwall Godrevy, first-winter ♀, 14th December to 2nd February 2004, photo (P. A. Gainey, A. R. Pay, M. Tunmore *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 97: plates 57 & 355).

Previously one of the most sought-after of all Nearctic vagrants, British birders were recently spoilt for choice with two simultaneous long-stayers (the Godrevy bird and another in Grimsby, Lincolnshire, in early 2004). By contrast, the Bardsey bird (the first for Wales) was found by a local farmer and seen by only a dozen birders during its two-day stay. The appearance of these birds appears to have been linked to a massive easterly displacement of this species, and other late migrants, from the North American Midwest to the eastern seaboard of the USA during the second week of November 2003 (*Birding World* 16: 463).

This attractive thrush remains an outstanding rarity, which is occurring here less frequently than in the recent past, despite the massive growth in numbers of active birders. Following eight in the 1960s, there were two in the 1970s, five in the 1980s and just one in the 1990s. The 21 British records are, as expected, concentrated in the south and southwest (Scilly and Lundy together account for about a third) but have reached almost every corner of Britain. With the exception of one in April and two in May, all have occurred in late autumn or winter.

(Breeds throughout North America from tree line of Alaska and N Canada, S to southern Mexico. Winters from southern Canada to southern USA and Central America, S to Guatemala.)



Mike Malpass

355. First-winter female American Robin *Turdus migratorius*, Godrevy, Cornwall, December 2003.

Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella certhiola* (1, 26, 1)

Shetland Skaw, Whalsay, first-winter, 28th September to 4th October, trapped 28th, photo (B. Marshall *et al.*).

(The race *rubescens* breeds across C and E Siberia, N to 64°N, from Irtysh River E to Yakutia and Sea of Okhotsk. Three other races breed to the S, from NE Kazakhstan through Mongolia to Ussuriland and N and NE China. Winters from Indian subcontinent to S China, and S throughout SE Asia.)

Lanceolated Warbler *Locustella lanceolata* (9, 87, 4)

Orkney North Ronaldsay, 8th September, trapped, photo (A. E. Duncan, N. Gates *et al.*). Near Burrian Point, Sanday, 29th September (G. P. Catley, K. Durose, D. M. Jenkins).

Shetland Fair Isle, 28th September, photo (S. J. Aspinall, D. N. Shaw, O. L. Wardman *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 411). Out Skerries, 30th September to 2nd October, photo (P. Forrest, M. J. McKee, C. Turner *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 97: plates 314 & 315).

A typical spread of dates, but it seems extraordinary that these include only the second and third records for Orkney, following one on Pentland Skerries way back in October 1910. In contrast, there are now more than 80 Shetland records! Perhaps, in recent years, this difference is more a reflection of the relative amounts of vegetation than observer effort, and it is just reward for North Ronaldsay Bird Observatory that its dedicated band of observers finally registered the island's first. Three more reports from Fair Isle are still under consideration, or have yet to be submitted.

(Singing males regular in E Finland. To E, breeds discontinuously from C Urals E across much of Siberia to Kamchatka, Kuril Islands, Hokkaido and NE China. Winters in Indian subcontinent, from Nepal E through NE India into SE Asia and Philippines.)

Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides* (many, 617, 3)

Devon Slapton Ley, ♂ in song, 27th April to 1st May (D. Elphick *et al.*).

Lancashire & North Merseyside Leighton Moss, ♂ in song, 9th-23rd May, photo (R. Hobbs, J. Reddish, J. Sneyd *et al.*).

Scilly St Mary's, ♂ in song, 28th April to 24th May (R. L. Flood, P. A. Stancliffe *et al.*).

2002 **Cambridgeshire** Fowlmere, ♂ in song, 18th-22nd May (M. Amos, R. W. Jones, J. Oates *et al.*).

2002 **Kent** Dungeness, ♂ in song, 15th-20th June, photo (D. Walker *et al.*).

The decision to readmit Savi's Warbler to the list of species considered by BBRC has been justified by its continued rarity. Just three records, all of singing birds, this year; these (together with the two from 2002 listed above) reinforce the fact that non-singing birds in particular are extremely rare in Britain. Of particular note was that the Scilly bird was the first for these well-watched islands. At the time of writing, none has been reported from the formerly regular localities in East Anglia.

One record for the year remains under review, from Fair Isle, Shetland, on 30th September. This may possibly relate to the eastern race *L. l. fusca*, and would be the first of this paler form to be recorded in Britain.

(Breeds discontinuously in W Europe, from Iberia to Netherlands; range contracting to SE, although still expanding NE into Estonia. To E, occurs through temperate Russia S through Ukraine to Black Sea coasts. European birds winter in W Africa from Senegal to N Nigeria. The race, *L. l. fusca*, breeds in C Asia from Caspian Sea E across Kazakhstan to NW China, wintering in NE Africa.)

Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola* (28, 1186, –)

1970 **Dorset** Portland Bill, juvenile, 24th August (R. J. Senior *et al.*); another, 12th September (G. Walbridge).

This species was removed from the list of species considered on 31st December 1982.

(Rare and localised breeder across E Europe from NE Germany, N to Lithuania and E to W Russia, with Belarus believed to hold largest breeding population. Entire population migrates SW in autumn to wintering areas in W Africa, believed to extend from Senegal E to Ghana, although there are very few records to support this.)

Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola* (2, 46, 5)

Kent Dungeness, 9th September, trapped, photo (W. Attridge, D. Walker, A. S. Wraithmell *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Bruernish, Barra, 26th-27th September, photo (K. Gillon *et al.*).

Shetland Foula, first-winter, 29th September to 8th October, trapped 29th, photo (A. R. Mainwood *et al.*); same, Kergord, 11th-12th October, trapped 12th, photo (R. Riddington, P. Sclater, B. H. Thomason *et al.*). Fair Isle, 14th October (P. A. A. Baxter, H. I. Scott).

Sussex, East Icklesham, 28th September, trapped, photo (M. Grantham, I. Hunter, P. Jones).

2001 **Scilly** St Mary's, 13th-14th October (*Brit. Birds* 96: 593), correct finders/identifiers were R. A. Filby, T. Francis.

The Barra record is further confirmation of the potential of that small island, which now seems set to receive thorough coverage for at least part of each autumn. The Dungeness individual was, perhaps, an overdue 'first' for Kent, while the one at Icklesham mirrors the only other Sussex record, trapped at the same site in October 1992. One wonders just how many others go undetected in southern reedbeds. The Shetland bird was interesting on two counts. Firstly, the short movement from Foula to Kergord was in a northeasterly direction, rather than northwesterly, which one might expect from a reverse migrant. Secondly, it spent nearly all its time foraging in the canopy of one of Shetland's few mature plantations, some 8-10 m above ground! This is a timely warning to birders not to take anything for granted, especially given some of the recent importance attached to habitat use by Booted *Hippolais caligata* and Sykes's Warbler *H. rama*.

(In Europe, restricted to Black Sea coasts from Bulgaria and Danube delta E to Ukraine. To E, breeds widely across steppes of S Russia and SW Siberia, Kazakhstan and NW China, S to Uzbekistan and N Pakistan. Winters throughout Indian subcontinent.)

Rebecca Nason

356. First-winter Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*, Fair Isle, Shetland, September 2003.

Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum* (9, 47, 7)

Essex Fisher's Green, ♂ in song, 16th June, sound-recorded, photo (S. Connor *et al.*).

Fife Isle of May, first-winter, trapped 1st October, photo (A. W. Lauder, J. M. A. Osborne, K. D. Shaw *et al.*).

Shetland Fair Isle, first-winter, 11th-17th September, trapped 11th, photo (A. J. Bull *et al.*) (plate 356). Quendale, first-winter, 15th-16th September, trapped 16th, photo (P. V. Harvey, R. Riddington *et al.*). Foula, first-winter, 28th September to 8th October, trapped 1st October, photo (D. & G. Atherton, P. V. Harvey, R. Riddington *et al.*). Skaw, Unst, first-winter, 5th-8th October, trapped 5th, photo (J. M. Collinson, P. M. Ellis, P. V. Harvey *et al.*).

Yorkshire, East Spurn, 8th-9th June, trapped 9th (P. Collins, B. R. Spence *et al.*).

(Breeds in S Finland, Estonia, Latvia and European Russia to 64°N. To E, found across C Siberia to Lake Baikal and upper Lena River, S through Kazakhstan and Tajikistan to N Pakistan. Winters throughout Indian subcontinent S to Sri Lanka and E into NW Burma.)

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* (18, 195, 2)

Kent Dungeness, ♂ in song, 15th May, photo (D. Walker *et al.*).

Lancashire & North Merseyside Marton Mere, ♂ in song, 21st-29th May, photo (L. G. Blacow, M. Jones *et al.*).

2002 **Kent** Grove Ferry, ♂ in song, 7th June (J. Cantelo, M. Heath, J. Russell).

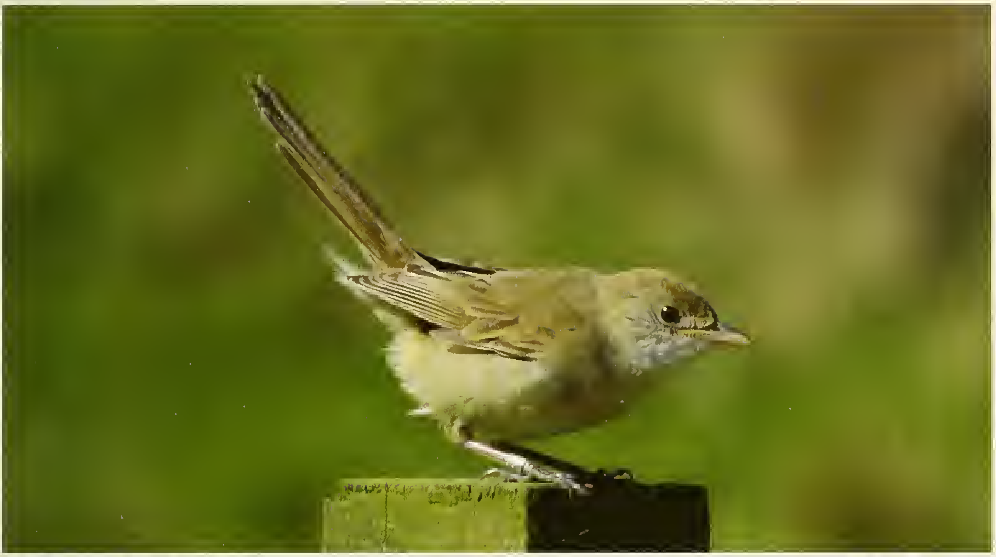
(Breeds discontinuously throughout much of continental Europe from Iberia to Greece, N to S Sweden and Finland, and E across S Russia, Turkey and Caucasus to W Siberia. To E, *A. a. zarudnyi* breeds in C Asia from Volga to NW China. Winters throughout C and S Africa.)

Thick-billed Warbler *Acrocephalus aedon* (1, 2, 1)

Shetland Fair Isle, adult, 16th-17th May, trapped 16th, photo (A. J. Bull, G. Tyler *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 250; 97: plate 357).

All four have been in Shetland but this is the first in spring. It comes just two years after the individual on Out Skerries in September 2001, which, by contrast, was the first for 30 years. Its arrival date strongly suggests that it had wintered somewhere in Europe or western Africa as this species does not normally leave its regular wintering grounds until mid April at the earliest, with many still present in southeast Asia until well into May.

(Breeds in S Siberia from Ob basin and N Mongolia to Ussuriland and NE China. Winters from Nepal E through NE India to Indochina and C Thailand.)



Hugh Harrop

357. Adult Thick-billed Warbler *Acrocephalus aedon*, Fair Isle, Shetland, May 2003.

Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Hippolais pallida* (0, 10, 1)

Dorset Portland, first-winter, 31st August, trapped, photo (M. Cade *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 335).

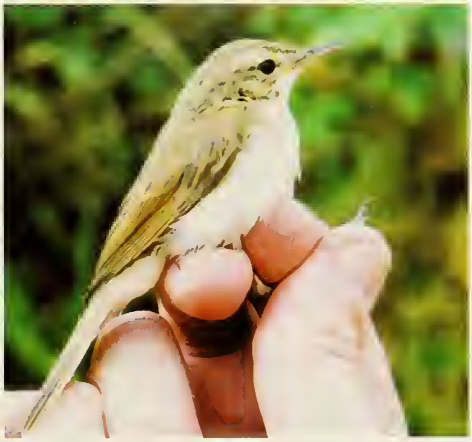
(Breeds throughout Balkans from Croatia to Greece and Turkey, S Caucasus, S Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Iraq, Iran and N Afghanistan. Migrates through Middle East to winter in E Africa.)

Booted Warbler *Hippolais caligata* (1, 85, 5)

Norfolk West Runton, 31st August to 2nd September (I. Prentice *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 336).
Scilly St Agnes, 28th-30th September (D. Page, R. Rhigaleto, N. Simpson *et al.*).
Shetland Quendale, 14th-19th September, photo (A. & G. J. Fitchett *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 412). Sumburgh, first-winter, 19th September, trapped, photo (P. V. Harvey, R. Riddington *et al.*) (plate 358). Norwick, Unst, 20th September, photo (S. E. Duffield *et al.*).

The photographs and details of the trapped bird in Shetland, which was quite a large-billed individual, were instructive and illustrated well the difficulties with identification now that we know Sykes's Warbler *H. rama* is a real possibility.

(Expanding W and breeding S Finland. To E, breeds C Russia and W Siberia to Yenisey Valley, C and N Kazakhstan to W Mongolia and W Xinjiang province, China. Winters N and peninsular India, S to Karnataka.)



Greg Fitchett

358. First-winter Booted Warbler *Hippolais caligata*, Sumburgh Head, Shetland, September 2003. This individual caused the observers considerable doubts about its identity in the field because, although the plumage characters (notably the head and wing pattern) fitted Booted Warbler, it appeared relatively long-billed, short-winged and long-tailed (structural features more associated with Sykes's Warbler *H. rama*). When trapped, the biometrics favoured Booted rather than Sykes's – but only just. The majority of the biometrics (checked by two ringers independently) were within the range of both species, but while all of them fitted Booted Warbler, two key measurements fell just outwith the published range of Sykes's. Selected details are given here to illustrate just how difficult some individuals may be to separate in the hand. Tail/wing ratio 0.776 (Sykes's 0.781-0.932, Booted 0.689-0.821); bill length (to skull) 14.5 mm (Sykes's 14.1-16.5, Booted 12.0-14.5); position of second primary (P2) falling between P6 and P7 (Sykes's most frequently P2=P7/P8, or shorter, Booted P2=P6/P7). Published ranges of the two species from Svensson 2001 (*Birding World* 14: 192-219).

Sykes's Warbler *Hippolais rama* (0, 6, 2)

Orkney North Ronaldsay, 29th September to 1st October, trapped 29th (P. A. Brown, A. E. Duncan, N. Gates *et al.*).

Shetland Baltasound, Unst, 4th-8th October, trapped 5th, photo (M. A. Maher, M. G. Pennington, B. H. Thomason *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 413).

2002 **Norfolk** Sheringham, 23rd August, photo (R. Lee, R. G. Millington *et al.*).

2002 **Sussex, East** Beachy Head, 31st August, photo (D. & J. F. Cooper, R. J. Fairbank *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 97: plates 310-312).

Given that last year's report was the first time that Sykes's Warbler appeared in the BBRC annual report as a full species, readers may be surprised to see that two individuals (both from 2002) have been accepted this year without the benefit of biometric data to support the field observations. These are the first field-only Sykes's to be accepted in Britain, and we stick with our comments last year that this is a species at the cutting edge of field identification (*Brit. Birds* 96: 595). As such, all the observers involved with the Beachy Head and the Sheringham birds deserve great credit, as the level of documentation provided was exceptional in both cases.

(Breeds C and S Kazakhstan to W Xinjiang province, NW China, S locally to Persian Gulf states, Iran, Afghanistan and N Pakistan. Winters N and W India, occasionally S to Sri Lanka.)

Booted/Sykes's Warbler *Hippolais caligata/rama* (1, 93, 7)

2002 **Cornwall** Land's End, 10th-15th September, photo (M. D. Warren *et al.*).

2002 **Orkney** North Ronaldsay, 26th August, trapped, photo (P. A. Brown, M. Gray, J. S. Lees *et al.*).

Both of the birds described above were candidates for Sykes's Warbler but, for different reasons, neither can currently be assigned with total confidence. The description of the Cornish bird suggested Booted Warbler, but on the video it showed some features of Sykes's and, in the end, it could not safely be attributed to either species. The bird on Orkney was even more difficult to assess, being an excellent candidate for Sykes's Warbler but with one apparently anomalous measurement. For the time being, it has been placed in this category as a holding measure, but remains under review. BBRC continues to review new identification criteria as they emerge, and it is hoped that the identification of Sykes's Warbler, both in the field and in the hand, and its separation from Booted Warbler, will become clearer in the coming years.

Asian Desert Warbler *Sylvia nana* (0, 11, 0)

1975 **Essex** Frinton-on-Sea, 20th-21st November (*Brit. Birds* 69: 349; 70: 168-169).

1975 **Yorkshire, East** Spurn Point, 20th-24th October, trapped (*Brit. Birds* 69: 349; 72: 123-124).

1979 **Cheshire** Meols, 28th October to 22nd November (*Brit. Birds* 73: 524).

1988 **Wight, Isle of** Bembridge Pools, 30th October (*Brit. Birds* 82: 548).

1991 **Wight, Isle of** Bembridge, 27th October to 9th November, trapped 27th, photo (*Brit. Birds* 85: 539-540).

1991 **Kent** Seasalter, 3rd-5th November, photo (*Brit. Birds* 86: 516).

1991 **Yorkshire, East** Flamborough Head, first-winter, 13th October to 5th November, trapped 13th, photo (*Brit. Birds* 86: 516).

1992 **Devon** Mount Gould, Plymouth, 19th-26th October, photo (*Brit. Birds* 86: 516).

1993 **Norfolk** Blakeney Point, ♂ in song, 27th May to 1st June, photo (*Brit. Birds* 87: 556).

2000 **Yorkshire, East** Sammy's Point, Easington, 7th-11th May, photo (*Brit. Birds* 94: 491).

In December 2003, BOURC announced its recommendation that Desert Warbler *Sylvia nana*, comprising the subspecies *nana* and *deserti*, be split into two monotypic species: Asian Desert Warbler *S. nana* and African Desert Warbler *S. deserti* (*Ibis* 146: 153-156). Prior to this announcement, BBRC had started a review of all but the first British record of this species. The first, on Portland, Dorset, from 16th December 1970 to 2nd January 1971, was trapped during its stay, and had been published as *S. n. nana* (*Brit. Birds* 65: 460-464; 66: 356). Only two of the ten subsequent accepted British records, at Spurn, East Yorkshire, and Frinton-on-Sea, Essex, both in 1975, were formally attributed to *S. n. nana* in these reports, while the 1979 Cheshire bird was published as 'showing the characteristics' of *nana*. It was, however, widely believed that *all* the records referred to *nana*, but even though comments to that effect had appeared (erroneously) in this report along with the record from East Yorkshire in 2000, this had never been formally acknowledged in print!

The separation of the two species should not be a problem if good views are obtained. The most obvious feature is perhaps Asian Desert Warbler's greyish-brown (drab sandy greyish-brown in autumn) upperparts, which contrast with the bright rufous rump and tail. In African Desert Warbler, there is less contrast between the upperparts (sandy-buff to almost golden) and the more rufous tail. With close views, the dark shaft-streaks on both the central tail feathers and the inner tertials may be seen on Asian Desert Warbler and are diagnostic. There are also a number of more subtle differences between the two species' bare-part coloration, tail pattern, head pattern, underparts and song (the latter heard from at least one British vagrant, the bird in Norfolk in 1993).

As anticipated, the review found that all the British records are attributable to Asian Desert Warbler. This is also the case with most, if not all, records from northwest Europe; for example, all nine Finnish records relate to Asian Desert Warbler (Heikki Luoto pers. comm.). The more sedentary African Desert Warbler appears to be an unlikely vagrant, though its occurrence here is perhaps not impossible. For example, it has been recorded in Italy (on Linosa Island, close to the North African coast, on 23rd April 1988; Andrea Corso pers. comm.), at least three times on Malta (in March, April and October), and on several of the Atlantic Islands. It might just follow in the footsteps of Moussier's Redstart *Phoenicurus moussieri*, White-crowned Black Wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga* and Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes githagineus* and make it to Britain one day. Since any vagrant desert warbler is still a major rarity and likely to receive close attention, it seems unlikely that one would be passed over for a 'mere' *nana*!

(Breeds N Caspian Sea through deserts of Kazakhstan and Mongolia to NW China to N Iran. Winters in deserts and arid regions from NE Africa, through Arabian Peninsula to Pakistan and NW India. Recently split African Desert Warbler *S. deserti*, local resident in deserts of S Morocco and Algeria, not recorded from Britain.)

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans* (9, 483, 11)

Cornwall Goran Haven, ♂, 3rd May (M. Davis). Predannack Airfield, ♂, 2nd September (D. S. Flumm).

Dorset Portland, first-summer ♂, 15th June, trapped, photo (M. Cade *et al.*).

Pembrokeshire Skokholm, ♂, 4th-5th May (G. Morgan, G. Thompson).

Shetland Foula, first-summer ♂ *S. c. albistriata*, 27th April to 4th May, probably same, 16th-18th May, photo (D. & G. Atherton, A. R. Mainwood, S. C. Votier). Fair Isle, first-summer ♀, 21st-22nd May (S. A. Boswell, T. C. R. Grant *et al.*); first-summer ♀, 3rd, 6th June (A. J. Bull, D. N. Shaw). Tresta, Fetlar, first-summer ♂, 7th June (P. R. French). Gorie, Bressay, ♂, 30th September (S. E. Duffield).

Surrey Lonsdale Road Reservoir, first-summer ♂, probably *S. c. albistriata*, 21st April, photo (R. J. Arnfield, J. Gordon *et al.*).

Yorkshire, East Easington, ♀, 18th-19th October, photo (A. A. Hutt *et al.*).

2002 Shetland Sumburgh Head, first-summer ♂, 28th May to 8th June (D. Houghton *et al.* per P. V. Harvey). Whalsay, ♂, 28th-29th May, photo (A., J. L. & K. Irvine).

We used to think of Subalpine Warblers as easy and fun, particularly the males, which could be admired without too much effort or concentration as they perched atop bushes on a sunny May morning. However, things are now getting complicated. Given the possibility of eastern and western taxa being split, and with a greater understanding of the field separation of the different forms, BBRC attempts to assign records to taxon wherever possible. For well-observed or photographed birds this is sometimes relatively straightforward, and the differences between typical adult males of the eastern *S. c. albistriata* and western *S. c. cantillans/inornata/moltonii* forms can be quite striking. There are, however, complicating factors, one example being first-summer males of the race *cantillans* which show less extensive coloration on the underparts, and may superficially resemble *albistriata*. Then there is the issue of the recently described form *moltonii* (Shirihai *et al.* 2001, *Sylvia Warblers*), from the western Mediterranean islands, which has a distinctively different call from other forms. There is also the possibility that birds from areas where the different taxa meet may show mixed characters. Consequently, we label individuals in this report as one taxon or the other only where the evidence is strong, and will continue to use the term 'probably' where the evidence is good but not definitive. It would be helpful to be able to assign as many as possible to subspecies, but, ultimately, our ability to separate them will come down to the effort put in by observers and the level of documentation received. Careful observation to determine age, plumage tones, feather wear and voice are all potentially helpful in separating the different forms.

(Four races widely but locally distributed throughout Mediterranean basin from NW Africa and Iberia N to S France, and E to Greece and W Turkey. Winters S of Sahara from Mauritania and Senegal to S Egypt and Sudan.)

Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala* (2, 62, 6)

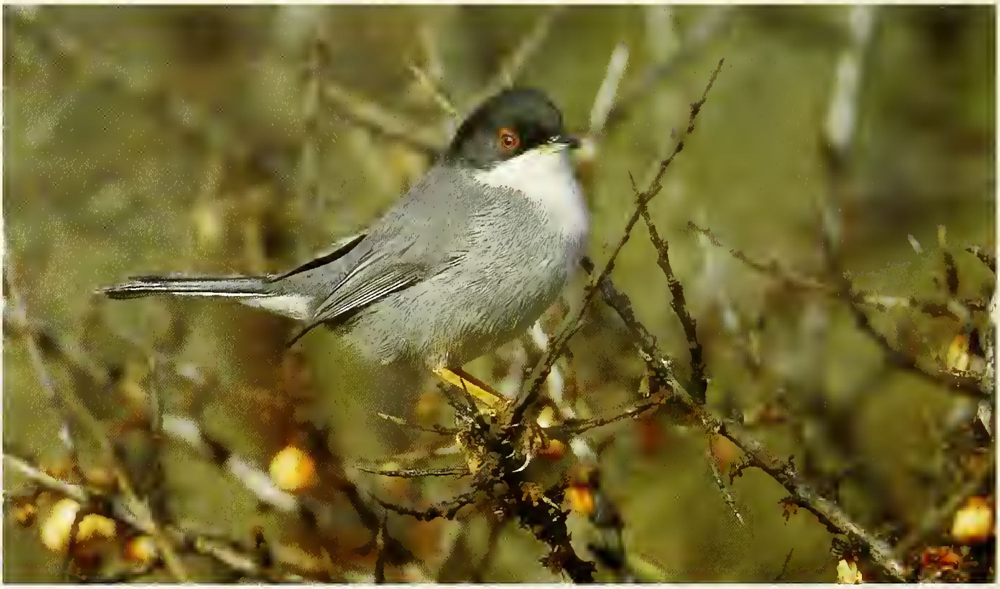
Lincolnshire Skegness, ♂, 2nd October to 11th January 2004, photo (K. M. Wilson *et al.*); ♀, 10th November to at least 4th January 2004, photo (K. Durose, J. Wright *et al.*) (fig. 9).

Norfolk Holme/Old Hunstanton, ♂, 16th-24th March, photo (N. M. Lawton *et al.*); possibly same as 2002 (*Brit. Birds* 96: 596) (plate 359). Beeston Bump, ♂, 29th March to 6th April, photo (L. Benson, J. V. Bhalerao *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plates 191 & 192). Winterton Dunes, ♂, 4th June (K. Brett, A. Leggatt, D. Parsons *et al.*).

Suffolk Dunwich Heath, ♂ in song, 12th July, sound-recorded (D. Sutton *et al.*).

A record year but how many birds were really involved? Owing to the lack of chronological overlap and the occurrence in the same geographical area, it is tempting to suggest that some of these records relate to the same wandering individual. The evidence is, however, wholly circumstantial and, given that the Skegness male was joined by a female from November into 2004, we know that multiple occurrences of this species can happen. We have opted to treat such records as no more than 'possibly' the same, which means that they are counted independently for statistical purposes.

(Largely resident or dispersive throughout Mediterranean basin, from NW Africa and Iberia to S France, N Italy and E to W Turkey and Israel. Some winter in N Africa from Sahara S to Mauritania and S Libya.)



Bill Baston

359. Male Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*, Holme, Norfolk, March 2003.

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*
European and west Siberian race *P. t. viridanus* (12, 356, 12)

Dorset Verne Common, ♂ in song, 7th June (C. E. Richards *et al.*).

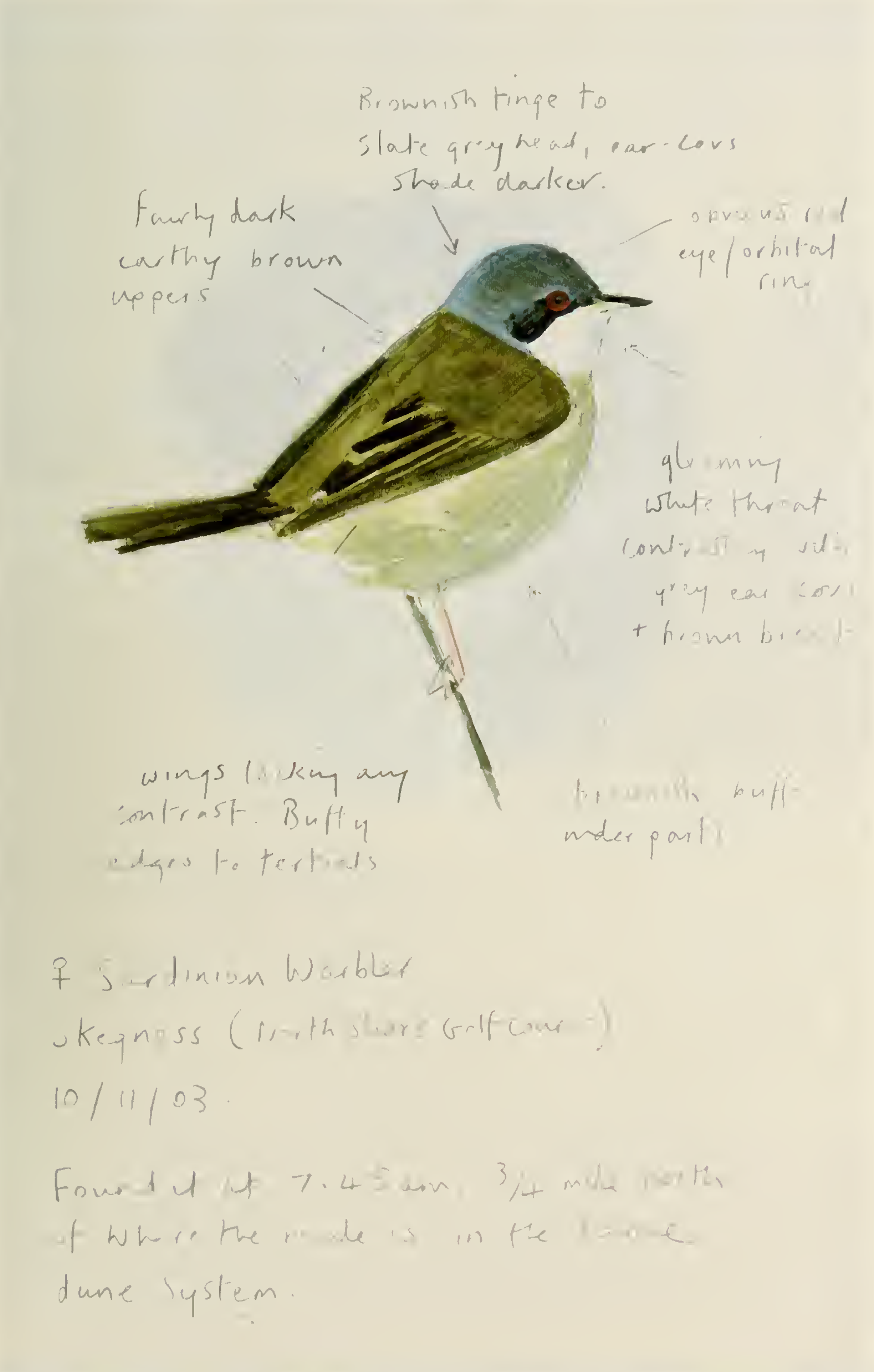
Kent Reculver, 26th-30th August, photo (T. P. Laws *et al.*).

Norfolk Scolt Head, 26th-27th August (G. F. Hibberd, N. M. Lawton). Holme, 31st August (D. & R. Roche *et al.*). Overstrand, 7th September (T. Eadson, B. W. Murphy).

Orkney North Ronaldsay, 20th August (H. Bell, N. Gates *et al.*).

Pembrokeshire Skokholm, 4th-5th June (G. Morgan *et al.*).

Shetland Foula, trapped 3rd June, photo (G. Atherton, A. R. Mainwood, S. C. Votier). Fetlar, 20th-22nd


Brownish tinge to slate grey head, ear-covs shade darker.
Fairly dark earthy brown uppers
obvious red eye/orbital ring
gleaming white throat contrasting with grey ear covs + brown breast
wings lacking any contrast. Buffy edges to tertials
brownish buff underparts
♀ Sardinian Warbler
Skegness (North Shore Golf Course)
10/11/03.
Found it at 7.45am, 3/4 mile north of where the male is in the dune system.

John Wright

Fig. 9. Female Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*, Skegness, Lincolnshire, November 2003.

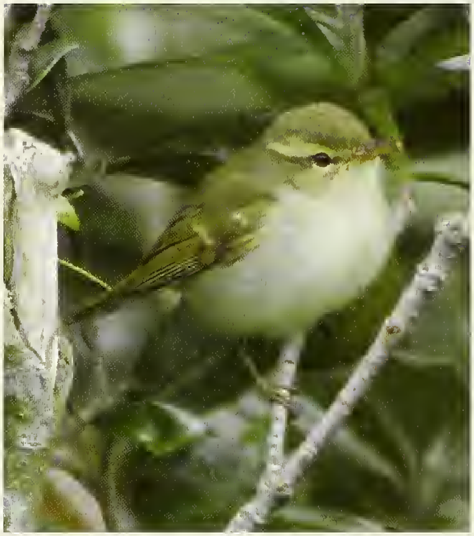
August (N. A. Littlewood *et al.*).

Suffolk Gunton, 25th-26th August, photo (J. A. Brown, A. Easton, J. Wright *et al.*).

Yorkshire, North Filey, 12th-13th August, photo (J. Horton, F. X. Moffatt *et al.*); 4th-7th September, photo (P. J. Dunn *et al.*).

(The European and W Siberian race *P. t. viridanus* has expanded W during 20th century to E Poland, Baltic countries and S Finland, with sporadic breeding in Germany, Czech Republic, Sweden and Norway. To E, breeds through Russia and W Siberia to Yenisey River, S through NW Mongolia to N Afghanistan and NW Himalayas. Winters throughout Indian subcontinent. Other races occur throughout Himalayas to SW China, wintering from Indian subcontinent to Indochina.)

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides* East Asian race *P. t. plumbeitarsus* (0, 2, 1)



Bryan Thomas

360. 'Two-barred Greenish Warbler' *Phylloscopus trochiloides plumbeitarsus*, Bryher, Scilly, September 2003.

Scilly Bryher, 27th-28th September, photo (S. J. Dodgson *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 97: plates 316, 317 & 360).

This is the third British record of this, the easternmost race of the Greenish Warbler complex, following those on Gugh (also Scilly) in October 1987 (*Brit. Birds* 86: 517; 94: 284-288) and at Holkham, Norfolk, in October 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 501); but see also *Brit. Birds* 96: 74-78. While the Bryher bird is thus the first September record, there is also a September record from The Netherlands. Although, in the northern part of its range, *plumbeitarsus* appears to be taxonomically distinct from Greenish Warblers of the race *viridanus*, there is a ring of intermediates linking these two races through the Himalayas (*Brit. Birds* 96: 327-331). Nonetheless, *plumbeitarsus* does look significantly different from the majority of Greenish Warblers that arrive on these shores. Despite the name, the key feature of separation is not the presence of a median-covert wing-bar, as this can, occasionally, be shown by *viridanus*. Observers finding a bird they believe to be of this race should not only ascertain the presence of two wing-bars, but also make a careful assessment of the width and length of the greater-covert bar (which is broad and formed by pale, squared-off tips to these feathers rather than the thinner crescents typical of *viridanus*, and extends further onto the inner coverts) and the facial pattern (which is somewhat similar to that of Arctic Warbler *P. borealis*, in that the supercilium stops short of the bill base). With increasing awareness of the characters of this form, further discoveries seem likely.

(Breeds SE Siberia from Lake Baikal and N Mongolia to Ussuriland, south to NE China. Winters S China to N Indochina and C Thailand.)

Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis* (19, 231, 9)

Orkney North Ronaldsay, 1st September, trapped, photo (P. A. Brown *et al.*); another, 3rd September, trapped (A. E. Duncan, K. F. Woodbridge *et al.*).

Shetland Skaw, Unst, 2nd July (S. E. Duffield *et al.*). Wester Quarff, 1st-3rd September (D. Coutts, D. Playfair *et al.*). Foula, first-winter, 9th September (R. B. Wynn *et al.*); 16th-18th September, trapped 17th (G. Atherton, A. R. Mainwood). Grutness, 17th September (R. M. Fray *et al.*). Fair Isle, 20th September, photo (J. G. Headon, J. A. Hobson, D. N. Shaw *et al.*) (plate 361).

Yorkshire, East Beacon Lane, Kilnsea and Spurn, 25th-31st August, trapped 26th, photo (P. Collins, T. McEvoy *et al.*).

(Breeds locally in N Scandinavia, becoming widespread across N Russia E to extreme NE Siberia, S to Baikal region, Ussuriland and NE China. Other races breed in Alaska, and Kamchatka through Kuril Islands to N Japan. Migrant through China to winter widely in SE Asia to Java, Philippines and Sulawesi.)

Rebecca Nason

361. Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*, Fair Isle, Shetland, September 2003.

Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei* (0, 50, 22)

Cleveland Skinningrove, 15th October (C. Dodsworth, S. J. Hinley, E. C. Parker *et al.*).

Cornwall Cot Valley, 25th-26th October (D. Brown, M. T. Elliott, S. Preddy *et al.*).

Dorset Pennsylvania Castle, Portland, 21st-22nd November (D. & G. Walbridge *et al.*).

Lincolnshire Gibraltar Point, 23rd-29th October, photo, sound-recorded (R. J. Cosgrove, K. M. Wilson *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 415).

Norfolk Trimingham, 17th-22nd October (A. Eadson, A. J. Kane, B. W. Murphy *et al.*). Hickling, 18th October (T. Barker, J. Hampshire). Wells-next-the-Sea, 21st-22nd October (J. R. McCallum, R. G. Newell, J. Oates *et al.*). Hemsby, 25th October (A. Grieve). Waxham, 26th-27th October, two on 27th (R. Harvey, A. J. Kane *et al.*). Great Yarmouth Cemetery, 30th November to at least 4th December (P. J. Heath *et al.*).

Northumberland Low Hauxley, 22nd October (M. J. Carr); 11th-12th November (M. J. Carr *et al.*).

Shetland Fair Isle, 13th-14th November, trapped 13th, photo (D. N. Shaw *et al.*); 17th-23rd November (D. N. Shaw *et al.*). East Ham, Bressay, 16th-23rd November, probably since 13th, photo (N. Davies, S. E. Duffield *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 97: plates 30 & 362).

Suffolk Sizewell, 18th-23rd October (R. Harvey *et al.*). Southwold, 20th-27th October, photo (J. H. Grant, D. Richardson *et al.*).

Sussex, East Beachy Head, 6th-10th November, sound-recorded (D., D. R. & J. F. Cooper *et al.*).

Yorkshire, East Spurn, 26th October to 1st November, trapped 26th, 29th, photo (P. Collins, L. J. Degnan *et al.*). Easington, 8th-11th November, trapped 11th; same, Spurn, 11th (T. R. Cleeves, M. Cunningham, B. R. Spence *et al.*). Holmpton, 9th November (G. J. Speight).

1985 Yorkshire, East Spurn, 26th-27th October, trapped 26th (A. S. Butler, J. Cudworth, B. R. Spence).

The 22 records in 2003 constitute the best year ever, allied to a bumper crop of Pallas's Leaf *Phylloscopus proregulus* and Yellow-browed Warblers *P. inornatus*, and this was the year in which many birders finally became acquainted with this rare species. This report features the first records for Lincolnshire, Suffolk and, more surprisingly, the bird-blessed Shetland Islands. This is very much an east-coast speciality; away from Portland, it is an extremely rare bird on the south coast, and even Scilly can muster only a single record. The arrivals in autumn 2003 came in two broad waves, the first in mid to late October, and the second in mid November. All the dates were fairly typical, although the one in Cleveland on 15th October was slightly earlier than the norm.

Despite this increasing familiarity, the identification of Hume's Warbler can be far from straightforward and care is essential. Dull Yellow-browed Warblers *P. inornatus* (and unusually bright Hume's) are out there, and the plumage of both species becomes increasingly dull (and potentially more

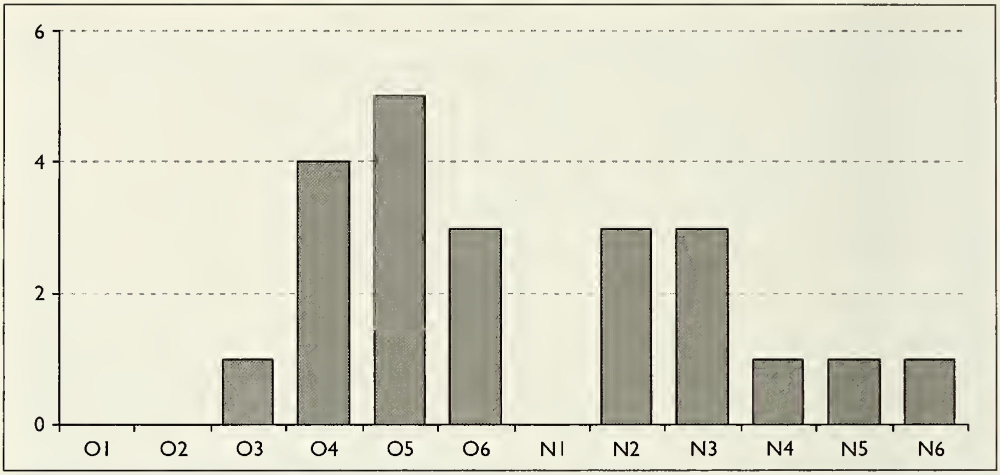
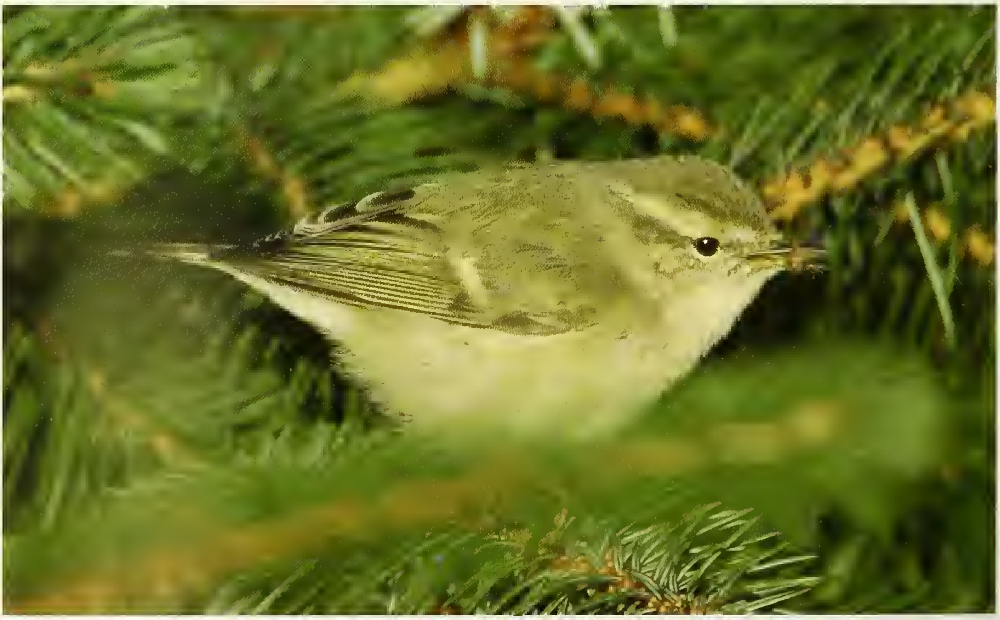


Fig. 10. The arrival time of accepted records of Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei* in autumn 2003 (October-November), shown in five-day periods (thus O1 represents 1st-5th October, O2 represents 6th-10th October, and so on).

similar) through the winter and spring. Calls remain a vital tool in the separation of these two closely related species. Nonetheless, interpreting the calls is not always easy, as Hume's Warblers have several quite different calls, not just one 'typical' one. Describing a call on paper is notoriously difficult; books and observers often rely on the traditional phonetic combinations of letters which cannot convey the tone, speed or volume of the sound. The best descriptions often draw comparisons with other, sometimes quite different, species. In addition to using phonetic transcriptions, we would strongly encourage observers to consider carefully how best to describe any call they hear and use whatever comparison comes to mind. Better still, of course, is the use of some sort of sound-recording, which is become increasingly popular with the arrival of lightweight digital equipment.

(Breeds in Altai Mountains, S through Tien Shan and Pamirs to NE Afghanistan, NW Himalayas and mountains in NW China. Winters in S Afghanistan to N India, E to W Bengal. Another race breeds in C China from Shanxi to S Yunnan, W to lower slopes of Tibetan plateau.)



Hugh Harrop

362. Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei*, Bressay, Shetland, November 2003.

Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi* (1, 242, 8)

Dorset Portland, 13th October, trapped, photo (M. Cade *et al.*).
Lincolnshire Gibraltar Point, 13th October (S. Pinder, T. Sykes, K. M. Wilson *et al.*).
Norfolk Bacton, 15th-16th October (M. Fiszer).
Shetland Fair Isle, 13th October (D. N. Shaw).
Suffolk Lowestoft, 13th October, photo (J. A. Brown, R. Fairhead).
Sussex, East Icklesham, 13th October, trapped, photo (D. Fletcher, J. Johnston, P. Jones *et al.*).
Yorkshire, East Spurn, 1st October, photo (J. Dempsey, N. Hunt, P. Thomason *et al.*); 12th October (M. Cunningham, G. E. Dobbs, D. Prestt *et al.*).
2001 Kent St Margaret's, 9th October (S. R. Warry *et al.*).
2002 Suffolk Orfordness, 12th-13th October, trapped 12th, (M. Marsh *et al.*); 30th October, trapped (J. Askins, D. Cormack, S. H. Piotrowski *et al.*).

It is noteworthy that all eight birds in 2003 arrived in the first half of October, a period during which only two of the Dusky Warblers *P. fuscatus* appeared. Although Radde's Warbler has a tendency to be slightly earlier than Dusky, it is clear that, in 2003, very few Dusky Warblers had entered western Europe when the main arrival of Radde's was underway. It will be interesting to monitor this trend in future, as the later arrival of Dusky must, in part, be responsible for those occasional overwintering birds.

(Breeds in S Siberia from Novosibirsk region E to Ussuriland and NE China. Migrates through E Asia to winter in N Burma, Indochina and C Thailand.)

Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus* (1, 249, 23)

Cleveland Brotton, 28th-30th October (M. A. Blick *et al.*).
Cornwall Land's End, 7th-15th November (M. D. Warren *et al.*). Nanjizal, 8th November (K. A. Wilson).
Devon Clennon Valley, Paignton, 21st November to 30th April 2004, photo (M. R. Langman *et al.*).
Dorset Portland, 9th November, trapped, photo (M. Cade *et al.*).
Lancashire & North Merseyside Fairhaven Dunes, 23rd-24th October, photo (M. Jones *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 416).
Norfolk Hemsby, 21st-27th October, photo (A. Grieve *et al.*). Waxham, 27th-30th October (P. J. Heath, B. W. Jarvis *et al.*). Caister-on-Sea, 9th-11th November (A. Grieve *et al.*). Sidestrand, 9th November (B. J. Murphy *et al.*). Warham Greens, 9th-11th November (C. A. Holt, S. J. Turner). Holkham Meals, 11th November (A. I. Bloomfield, J. R. McCallum). Messingham, 11th-16th November (A. J. Kane *et al.*). Wells, 11th November (A. I. Bloomfield, J. R. McCallum).
Orkney South Cara, South Ronaldsay, 9th-15th November (E. R. Meek *et al.*).
Pembrokeshire Porth Clais, near St David's, 10th-13th November (P. Grennard, O. Roberts *et al.*).
Shetland West Manse, Fetlar, 14th October (M. Smith, B. H. Thomason). Fair Isle, first-winter, trapped 22nd October (A. J. Bull, C. A. Holt, S. J. Turner *et al.*). Foula, 22nd-24th October, trapped 22nd (D. & G. Atherton, A. R. Mainwood *et al.*). Out Skerries, 24th-25th October (P. M. Ellis, J. D. Okill, R. Riddington *et al.*). Sumburgh, 4th-8th November, trapped 4th, photo (P. M. Ellis, R. Riddington *et al.*).

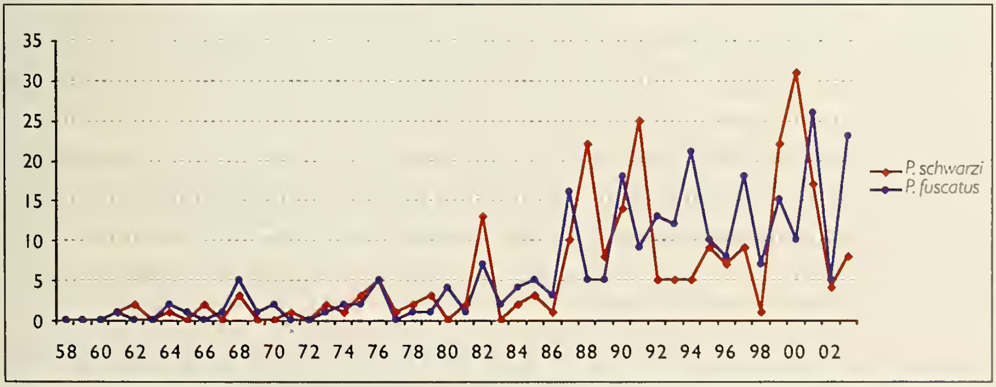


Fig. 11. Accepted records of Radde's *Phylloscopus schwarzi* and Dusky Warblers *P. fuscatus* in Britain, 1958-2003. See also *Brit. Birds* 97: 303-304.

Suffolk See 2002 Suffolk below.

Yorkshire, North Filey, 13th-14th October, photo (J. & T. G. Davis *et al.*); 29th-30th October, photo (J. Horton *et al.*).

2002 Suffolk Kessingland, 30th December to 6th January 2003 (D. J. Holman, J. Zantboer *et al.*).

Following last year's comparatively lean showing, a welcome return to form for this inveterate skulker; this is the second-best year on record, eclipsed only by the 26 in 2001 (see fig. 11). The main arrival took place in the second week of November and, not surprisingly, Norfolk and Shetland accounted for more than half of this year's crop of records. The well-watched Devon bird and the one in 2002/03 in Suffolk are particularly noteworthy as they continue the recent trend of occasional overwintering in southern England, a habit yet to be recorded in Radde's Warbler *P. schwarzi.*

(Breeds in Siberia from Ob River N to 60°N, E to Sea of Okhotsk, S to Russian Altai, N Mongolia and Ussuriland through NE China. Winters S China and SE Asia to Singapore. Another race breeds on Tibetan plateau.)

Western Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus bonelli* (1, 60, 2)

Cornwall Nanjizal, 26th-28th September, trapped 26th, 28th, photo (J. M. & K. A. Wilson *et al.*).

Yorkshire, East Beacon Lane, Kilnsea, 30th September, photo (G. Taylor *et al.*).

2002 Scilly St Martin's, 4th-6th October (*Brit. Birds* 96: 599), finder/identifier was T. Vaughan.

(Breeding range centred on SW Europe from Iberia to N France, S Germany, Italy, Austria, and locally in mountains of N Africa. Winters along S edge of Sahara, from Senegal and S Mauritania to N Cameroon.)

Iberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus ibericus* (0, 7, 1)

Devon Kingswear, ♂ in song, 19th May to at least 17th June, possibly since 6th May, sound-recorded (M. R. Langman, S. J. Lees *et al.*).

2000 Kent Dungeness, ♂ in song, 14th-17th April, sound-recorded (A. S. Wraithmell *et al.*).

The acceptance of these two records proved relatively straightforward. In combination, the three-phase song (including a short trill or stutter at the end); the classic downward-inflected Siskin *Carduelis spinus*-like call; white underparts; strong and slightly yellow facial pattern; brighter green upperparts, including the rump and uppertail-coverts; and the pale bare parts were all typical.

As well as these two records, the Committee has had to face the task of assessing two non-singing birds: a first-winter from Bardsey, Caernarfonshire, and a spring 2000 record from Portland, Dorset. The former, after much deliberation and a number of circulations, was found to be unacceptable. The latter is currently pending, while further investigations are carried out. The assessment of non-singing birds is far from easy, and although there are two formulae which can be used to 'identify' Iberian Chiffchaff (Svensson 2001, *Bull. B.O.C.* 121: 281-296), the Committee is reluctant to use these on extralimital, non-singing birds.

(Breeds locally in French Pyrenees and S throughout W Iberia. N African range restricted to NW Morocco and N Algeria to NW Tunisia. Wintering range still poorly known.)

Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla* (0, 21, 1)

Kent Dungeness, 14th-16th October (D. Walker *et al.*).

(Widespread resident throughout continental W Europe, from S Spain N to Denmark and E to Poland, W Ukraine and Greece. Elsewhere, resident in mountains of N Africa, W Turkey and W Caucasus.)

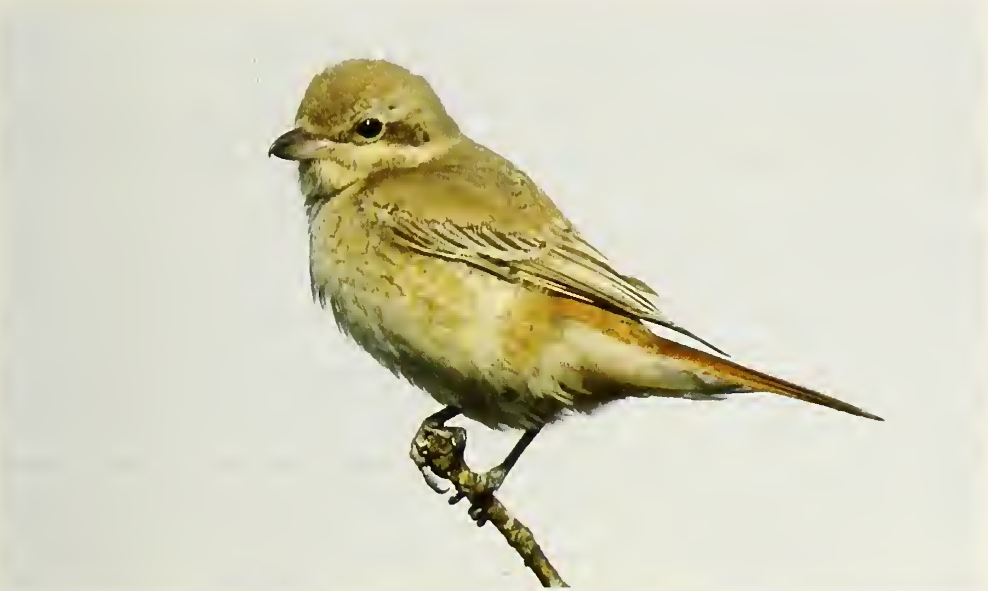
Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus* (0, 157, 10)

Devon Slapton Ley, ♂, 22nd December to 23rd February 2004, photo (B. Whitehall *et al.*).

Dorset Abbotsbury, 24th October (S. A. Groves). Lodmoor, two juveniles, 26th October, presumed same, 15th-17th December (D. J. Chown *et al.*).

Kent Dungeness, two ♂♂, ♀ and two juveniles, 24th October (P. G. Akers, R. J. Price, A. Thunder *et al.*); juvenile, 10th November (R. J. Price).

(Widely but locally distributed throughout C and E Europe, from Denmark, Germany and Italy NE to C Sweden and Estonia. Absent from much of NW Europe but locally numerous in Spain. To E, breeds from S Russia to Volga River. Largely resident or dispersive in Europe. Other forms, some of which are regarded as separate species by some authorities, occur in C Asia and from S Siberia to NE China, and winter in NW Indian subcontinent, S China and S Japan.)



Rebecca Nason

363. First-winter Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*, St Martin's, Scilly, October 2003.

Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus* (1, 58, 5)

Lincolnshire Donna Nook, juvenile/first-winter, 13th October, photo (B. M. Clarkson, M. J. Tarrant *et al.*).

Norfolk Scolt Head, first-winter, 18th October (N. M. Lawton, M. E. S. Rooney, N. Williams); presumed same, Burnham Norton, 26th-27th, photo (D. Bridges, A. J. J. Smith *et al.*).

Scilly St Martin's, first-winter, 23rd-24th October, photo (A. Beolans *et al.*) (plate 363).

Shetland Out Skerries, first-winter ♂, killed by cat, 30th September, now at National Museums of Scotland (J. Lidster, M. J. McKee, E. Tait *et al.*).

Somerset Porlock Marsh, ♂ *L. i. pheonicuroides*, 3rd June, photo (D. J. Chown *et al.*).

BBRC's work on subspecies identification mentioned in last year's report (*Brit. Birds* 96: 601) continues in a somewhat 'two steps forward, one step back' manner. Some adults are readily diagnosible, as may be some first-years, but others continue to present much greater problems.

(Four races breed widely but discontinuously in C Asia, from Caspian Sea and W Iran through Kazakhstan to Tajikistan, Afghanistan and N Pakistan to S Mongolia and NW China, with isolated population from Zaidam depression to N Tibetan plateau. Winters in NE and E Africa, S Arabian Peninsula, S Iran and NW Indian subcontinent.)

Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach* (0, 1, 0)

2000 Outer Hebrides Howbeg and Howmore, South Uist, first-winter, 3rd-4th November, probably since 27th October, photo (J. C. Brain, B. Rabbitts, A. Stevenson *et al.*).

This bird arrived during a period in which other eastern vagrants (including Brown *L. cristatus*, Southern ('Steppe') Grey *L. meridionalis pallidirostris* and Isabelline Shrikes *L. isabellinus*) were found in Britain, Ireland and elsewhere in Europe. The identification of the South Uist Long-tailed Shrike to species level posed no problems, and plumage characters established that it was a first-winter, most probably of the migratory northern race *L. s. erythronotus*. However, two characters (the lilac tinge to the neck, and white above the eye) did not fit *erythronotus* and were more suited to individuals of the largely sedentary race *L. s. caniceps*, which has a more southerly distribution than *erythronotus*, and would be an unlikely vagrant to western Europe. Is it conceivable that there is a poorly described form of Long-tailed Shrike somewhere in Asia about which we know very little?

(Race *L. s. erythronotus* breeds SE Kazakhstan, S Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, NE Iran and Afghanistan to N India. Northern populations migrate to winter in Indian subcontinent. Other races occur in Indian subcontinent, S China, SE Asia and highlands of Papua New Guinea.)

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor* (36, 128, 2)

Norfolk Acle Straight, ♂, 26th June to 1st July, photo (I. Ellis, C. Morrison *et al.*).
Shetland Fair Isle, ♂, 5th June, photo (T. C. R. Grant *et al.*).

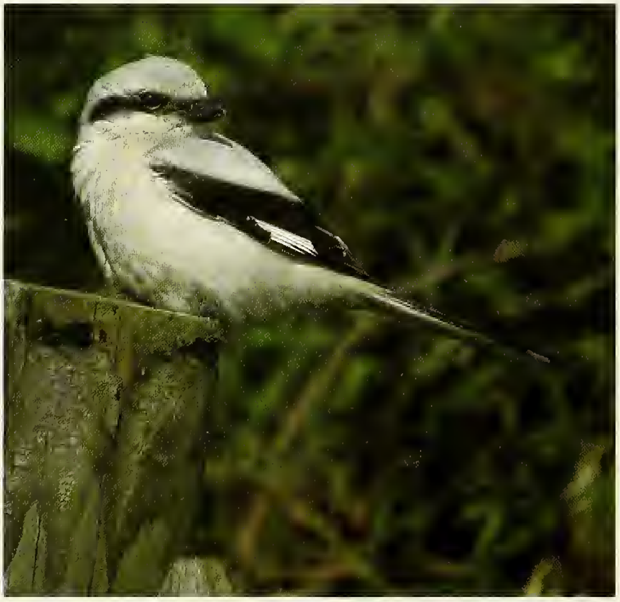
(European range centred E of Balkans to E Poland, with small numbers W through N Mediterranean to S France and NE Spain. To E, breeds locally from Black Sea coasts, across S Russia and Kazakhstan to extreme NW China and SW Siberia. Migrates through E Africa to winter in S Africa, from Namibia to S Mozambique and N South Africa.)

Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis*
Central Asian race *L. m. pallidirostris* (2, 15, 1)

Man, Isle of Ballaghennie Ayres, first-summer ♂ in song, 17th June to 12th July, photo (C. Sharpe, C. Wormwell *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 278; 97: plate 364).

All but one of the previous 17 British records of *pallidirostris* have concerned birds arriving between mid September and early December, with a peak in late October and November. The remaining record involved one at Cape Cornwall and Kenidjack Carn, on 21st-23rd April 1993 (*Brit. Birds* 86: 524). Like the Cornish bird, the Ballaghennie Ayres bird proved to be particularly educational, and debunked one or two misconceptions about the appearance of *pallidirostris* in summer plumage (for example that the lores and the basal part of the bill must be pale, which is clearly not so).

A review of skins at the Natural History Museum, Tring, showed that the only subspecies of Southern Grey Shrike to match *pallidirostris* in the pale tone of the upperparts is the Saharan form *leucopygos*; other 'pale' forms, such as *elegans* and *aucheri*, are clearly darker in tone on their upperparts. There are pale forms of Great Grey Shrike *L. excubitor*, such as *homeyeri* (*leucopterus* is often considered synonymous with this form), but this can be eliminated since it has extensive white across the base of the secondaries.



Chris Wormwell

364. First-summer male Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis* of central Asian race *pallidirostris*, Ballaghennie Ayres, Isle of Man, June 2003.

Other issues, such as the taxonomy of *pallidirostris*, are still being investigated. Should it be deemed eventually to have full species status, then there is the task of giving it an English name. It is commonly known as 'Steppe Grey Shrike', yet it is clearly not a typical species of the steppe. In terms of habitat, it is most closely associated with Saxaul scrub, and so perhaps the name of 'Saxaul Grey Shrike', as proposed by Lars Svensson (*Birdwatch* 146: 34-38), would be more appropriate.

(Resident races occur Iberian Peninsula and S France to North Africa, Middle East and India. Migratory form *L. m. pallidirostris*, which has occurred in W Europe, breeds C Asia from lower Volga E to S Mongolia and extreme NE China, S to N Iran and N Pakistan. Winters to S and W of breeding range from Sudan, N Ethiopia and Somalia through Arabian Peninsula to W Iran.)

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*
West Mediterranean islands' race *L. s. badius* (0, 3, 0)

1986 **Dorset** Portland, ♂, 10th May (A. G. Clarke, C. D. Head *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 80: 563).
1995 **Kent** Dungeness, ♀, 15th-21st July, trapped 18th, photo (D. Walker *et al.*).
1995 **Norfolk** Great Cressingham, ♂, 2nd-6th July, photo (A. Goodall *et al.*).

Although Woodchat Shrike was dropped from the BBRC list at the end of 1990, the Committee has reviewed the rarity archive to examine potential records of the western Mediterranean islands' subspecies *L. s. badius.* Prior to that date, a small number of claims of this race were made, but, having stated in 1987 that BBRC was of 'the opinion… that the characters of this race are not sufficiently well defined to distinguish such individuals from some individuals of the nominate race' (*Brit. Birds* 80: 563), we have now had to re-evaluate our position.

Following detailed examination of specimens at the Natural History Museum, Tring, combined with field observations of *badius*, BBRC has gained a much better understanding of the features by which *badius* may be identified. This is centred on the absence (or virtual absence) of a white patch at the base of the primaries on the closed wing, which is a conspicuous feature on other races. The results of our research will be published in *British Birds* shortly. In the meantime, the three records listed above have been found to meet these criteria, and BOURC has accepted Woodchat Shrike of the form *L. s. badius* onto category A of the British List.

(Breeding range of *L. s. badius* restricted to islands in W Mediterranean including Balearic Islands, Corsica and Sardinia, E to Elba and Capraia. Migrates to winter in West Africa, from Ivory Coast to N Cameroon.)

Rose-coloured Starling *Sturnus roseus* (24, 462, –)

2001 Gower Horton, juvenile, taken into care sick, 28th November, released in good health, 7th January 2002 (S. Allen *et al.*).

This species was removed from the list of species considered on 31st December 2001.

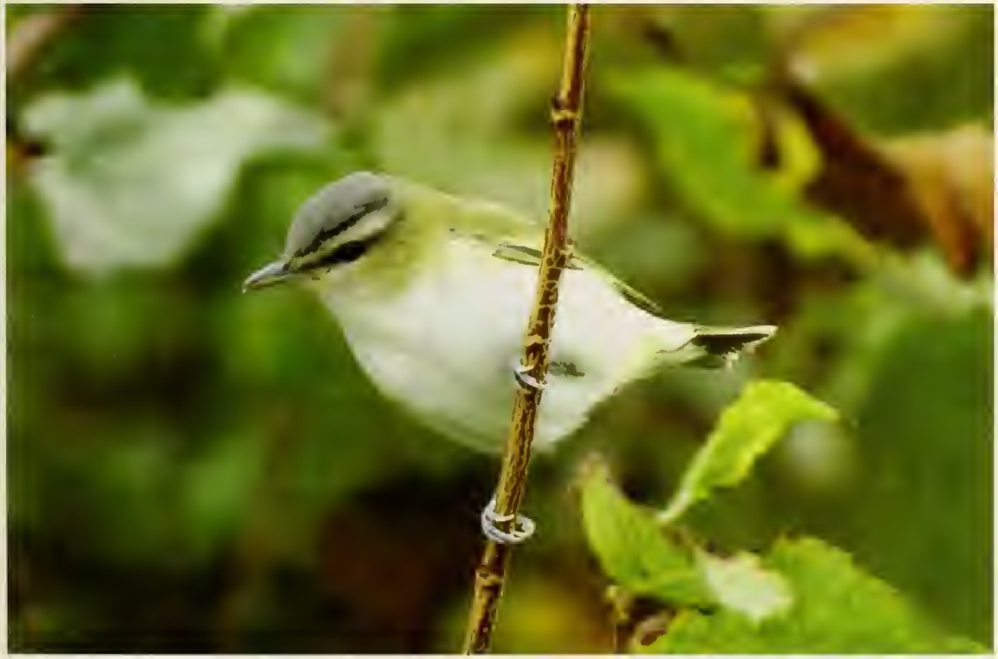
(Irruptive, regularly reaching SE Europe but only occasional breeder, erratically W to Hungary. Core breeding range extends from S Ukraine and C Turkey E across S Russia to E Kazakhstan and S through Iran to Afghanistan. Winters throughout India S to Sri Lanka.)

Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus* (0, 96, 3)

Outer Hebrides Aird Mhor Plantation, Barra, 5th-7th October, photo (M. Oksien *et al.*).

Scilly St Mary's, 11th October, photo (I. Lewington *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 418; 97: plate 365). St Martin's, 13th-14th October, photo (A. C. Lees *et al.*).

(Breeds throughout S Canada, and USA E of Rocky Mountains. Migrates throughout E USA to winter in N South America. Other races resident in South America.)



Steve Young/Birdwatch

365. Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus*, St Mary's, Scilly, October 2003.

Arctic Redpoll *Carduelis hornemanni* (26, 772, 11)

Shetland Lerwick, first-winter ♂ *C. h. hornemanni*, 22nd September, found dead, now at the National Museums of Scotland, photo (J. A. & P. M. Ellis *et al.*). Skaw and Norwick, Unst, first-winter ♂ *C. h. hornemanni*, 28th September to 16th October, trapped 5th October, photo (P. S. Crockett, I. Gordon, M. G. Pennington *et al.*) (plate 366); another *C. h. hornemanni*, age/sex uncertain, 5th-21st October, photo (S. E. Duffield, M. A. Maher, M. G. Pennington *et al.*); Skaw, *C. h. hornemanni*, age/sex uncertain, 17th-19th October, photo (M. G. Pennington). Toab, ♂ *C. h. hornemanni*, 30th September (P. M. Ellis *et al.*). Fair Isle, *C. h. hornemanni*, age/sex uncertain, 2nd-3rd October (S. J. Aspinall, O. L. Wardman *et al.*). Foula, race, age/sex uncertain, 5th-6th October, photo; another, race, age/sex uncertain, 5th-7th October (J. M. & T. P. Drew, A. R. Mainwood, M. A. Wilkinson); first-winter *C. h. hornemanni*, 10th-11th October, trapped 11th, photo (J. M. & T. P. Drew, A. R. Mainwood, M. A. Wilkinson); first-winter *C. h. hornemanni*, 11th October to 1st November, trapped 12th, photo (J. M. & T. P. Drew, A. R. Mainwood, M. A. Wilkinson *et al.*). Loch of Gutcher, Yell, first-winter ♂ *C. h. hornemanni*, 7th October, later found dead, now at the National Museums of Scotland, photo (J. H. Ballantyne, P. V. Harvey, E. Knight *et al.*).

1995 Norfolk Blakeney Quay, 21st November (D. J. Holman).

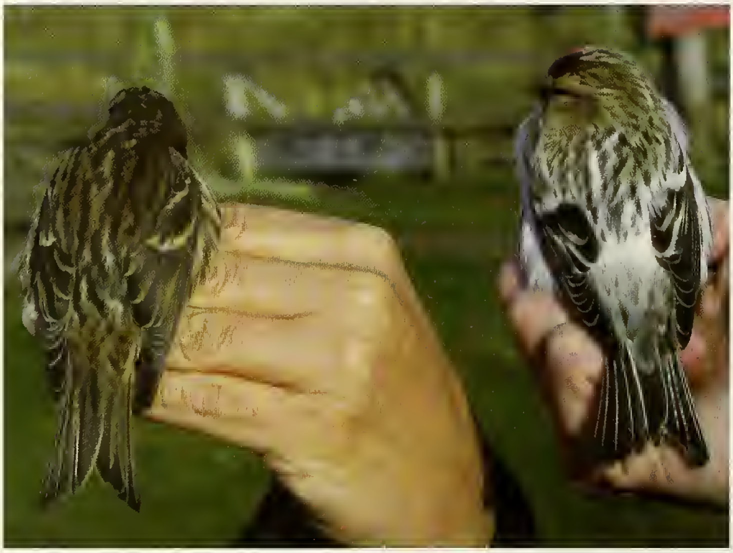
1999 Shetland Foula, 30th September (J. M. & T. P. Drew).

2002 Orkney Newark, Sanday, 18th October (K. Durose).

This represents the first significant influx of the northwestern race *C. h. hornemanni* into Britain. Of the eleven listed here, nine were assigned to this race, and it is likely that the remaining two were also *hornemanni*. Two further autumn records, from Orkney and Shetland, are still under consideration and they too were considered to be *hornemanni*. The first record of this race for The Netherlands also occurred during this period (*Dutch Birding* 25: 420-421). Although identification to subspecies should be undertaken with caution, a combination of size (most easily judged against other redpolls) and plumage – notably a rich chamois-leather wash on the face, throat and breast and typically fairly uniformly frosty-grey upperparts (lacking the striking pale central panel and tawny-/brown-edged mantle so often shown by *C. h. exilipes*) – are useful pointers.

Nonetheless, observers should beware of markedly cold-looking redpolls from the northwest, several of which have occurred in the Northern Isles in recent autumns and caused real problems. Critical observation of the rump and undertail-coverts (sometimes in the hand) was needed to confirm that these were indeed just Common Redpolls *C. flammea*. Exactly where these birds come from is something of a mystery as observers with recent field experience in Iceland suggest that birds matching this appearance simply do not occur there or, at best, are extremely rare. Are they all from Greenland? Heaven help records committees if just a few individual *C. h. hornemanni* are at large somewhere in Iceland and hybridising with the local *C. f. islandica*.

(Circumpolar Arctic, with European breeding range restricted to N Scandinavia. Race *C. h. exilipes* breeds on tundra of Arctic Eurasia, Alaska and Canada to Hudson Bay. Nominate race breeds Ellesmere and Baffin Island to N Greenland. Both races disperse S in winter, irregularly reaching NW Europe.)



Micky Maher

366. First-winter Arctic Redpoll *Carduelis hornemanni* of nominate race (right), with Common Redpoll *C. flammea* (one of the northwestern races, *rostrata* or *islandica*), Skaw, Unst, October 2003.

Two-barred Crossbill *Loxia leucoptera* (1, 103, 5)

Buckinghamshire Hedgerley, ♂, 27th January to 14th March, photo (P. & M. McManus *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 100).

Highland Morangie, Easter Ross, two ♂♂, two ♀♀, 27th March to 14th April, photo, sound-recorded (R. Dawson, I. A. Dillon, R. Griffiths *et al.*).

2002 Shetland Tingwall, ♀, 21st August (P. Sclater). Noss, ♂, 23rd-24th August (O. Gabb, S. Thomas *et al.*).

2002 Yorkshire, South Bole Edge Plantation, ♂, 1st-5th September, photo (M. Garner *et al.*).

(Local resident within larch *Larix* sp. forests of N Eurasia from N Russia to E Siberia, reaching Sea of Okhotsk and S to Baikal region. Irruptive dispersal leads to irregular breeding in Finland and very occasionally in Sweden and Norway. Outside breeding season, dispersal occasionally reaches NW Europe. Nominate form breeds across N North America, and Hispaniola.)

Yellow-rumped Warbler *Dendroica coronata* (1, 15, 1)

Orkney Evie, 31st October to 6th November, photo (D. Matson, J. B. Ribbands, E. J. Williams *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 419).

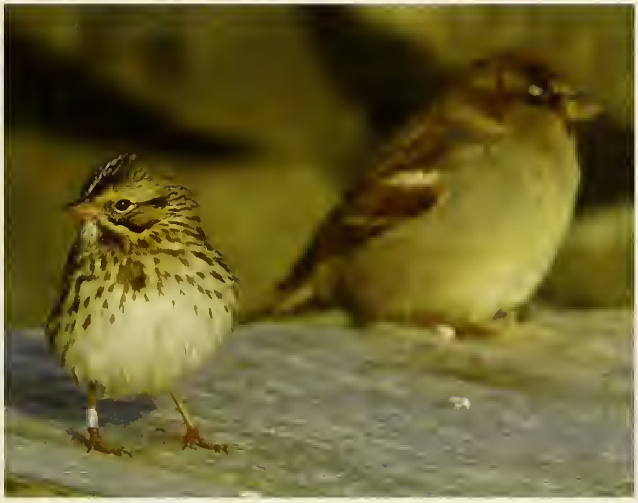
The sixth for Scotland and the second for Orkney. This well-photographed individual highlighted the benefits of garden feeders, and for the best part of three days delighted observers by feeding on apple halves in the company of a Waxwing *Bombycilla garrulus* and a Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*. A full account appears in *Birding Scotland* 6: 175-177.

(Nominate race breeds throughout much of North America from Alaska E through Canada to Newfoundland, S to Michigan and Massachusetts. Migrates E of Rocky Mountains to winter throughout C America and the Caribbean. Another race occurs in SW Canada and W USA.)

Savannah Sparrow *Passerculus sandwichensis* (0, 2, 1)

Shetland Fair Isle, first-winter, 14th-19th October, trapped 14th, photo (D. N. Shaw, J. G. Walmsley *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 420; 97: plate 367).

Only the third record for Britain, following those in Dorset in April 1982 and on Fair Isle in September-October 1987. Given its unobtrusive nature and subtle identification features, and the fact that the yellow in the fore-supercilium of this individual was only visible at close range, it is likely that others in Britain go unnoticed and unrecorded, as this is one of the commonest Nearctic sparrows. Along with the Siberian Rubythroat *Luscinia calliope* (present on Fair Isle on 17th-19th), it made a sensational 'double' for mainland birders, and the Fair Isle airstrip endured its busiest period ever!


Hugh Harrop

367. First-winter Savannah Sparrow *Passerculus sandwichensis* with House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*, Fair Isle, Shetland, October 2003.

(Breeds widely across North America from N Alaska and Canada, S to Baja California and W Virginia. N populations migrate to winter S of breeding range. Race *P. s. princeps* breeds only on Sable Island, winters W Atlantic coast from Nova Scotia to Georgia. Other races resident in Mexico S to SW Guatemala.)

White-throated Sparrow *Zonotrichia albicollis* (1, 23, 3)

Cheshire Caldy, 21st-23rd May, photo (R. Smith *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 253).

Shetland Fetlar, 10th-11th May, photo (A. Hughson, M. Smith *et al.*). Fair Isle, ♂ in song, 9th June, photo (D. N. Shaw *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 279).

Three in a year is unprecedented (although there were two in 1968, 1987, 1992, 1996 and 2002). The locations and dates are broadly typical; Shetland alone accounts for 11 of the 27 British records.

(Breeds North America from SE Yukon E to Newfoundland, S to Great Lakes and N USA to New Jersey. Winters SE USA, from Massachusetts S to Florida, Texas and into N Mexico and California.)

Dark-eyed Junco *Junco hyemalis* (0, 23, 1)

Shetland Out Skerries, first-summer ♂ *J. h. hyemalis*, 1st-9th May, trapped 1st, 9th, photo (E. Tait *et al.* per R. Riddington) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 219).

This was the first since two in 2000. There have now been four on Shetland's outer islands, although surprisingly none has yet appeared on Fair Isle. All four arrived between 1st and 10th May, which fits in well with their migration pattern in North America where they are one of the earliest returning migrants in spring. Indeed the vast majority of British records have been in spring.

(Breeds throughout North America from tree line of N Alaska and Canada, S to S California, N Texas and N Georgia, USA. British occurrences relate to form previously recognised as Slate-coloured Junco, breeding throughout N and E of range, S to Georgia. N populations migratory, wintering to S of breeding range.)

Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos* (2, 37, 2)

Shetland Haroldswick, Unst, ♂, 31st October to 1st November (C. Batty, M. A. Maher *et al.*).

Yorkshire, East Flamborough Head, ♀ or first-winter, 11th-12th November (A. M. Allport, M. Garner).

1994 **Orkney** Sanday, ♂, 22nd October (*Brit. Birds* 88: 551), previously published as accepted but now considered inadequately documented.

1995 **Shetland** Fair Isle, ♂, 29th-30th October (I. Barton, M. A. Newell, R. Riddington).

2000 **Pembrokeshire** Skokholm, ♂, 28th April (T. Purcell, G. Thompson).

2001 **Caernarfonshire** Bardsey, ♂, 30th April (S. D. Stansfield *et al.*).

Until this year, BBRC had adopted a potentially contradictory policy on male Pine Buntings. If a bird was seen to show traces of yellow in the pale fringes to the primaries, it was deemed to be of hybrid origin and, therefore, not accepted; whereas those birds which might not have been seen well enough to be certain about the colour of these fringes, but showed all other characters of a male Pine Bunting, were considered acceptable. This difficult situation was clearly untenable and change was required.

Debated fully at the 2004 BBRC AGM, there seemed to be two alternatives open to us: to accept only those birds that were trapped or photographed, in order to ensure that no yellow was present; or to acknowledge that, as long as the bird showed no features of hybrid origin other than some yellow in the primary fringes, it was acceptable. We contacted all the European Rarities Committees and found that no common policy existed, although the trend was more towards the second option. During these discussions with other committees, it became clear that this problem was not confined to Pine Bunting. For example, the Norwegian Rare Birds Committee recently received a series of superb photographs of what would have been their third record of Black Duck *Anas rubripes*. One image, however, showed that the pale tips to the greater coverts were broader than normal for Black Duck, intimating some degree of Mallard *A. platyrhynchos* influence. In previous correspondence about this species pair, we have established that some males in Toronto, Canada, show curled uppertail-coverts as the only sign of Mallard hybridisation (R. Pittaway pers. comm.). In similar vein to the present situation with Pine Bunting, we doubt that many British birders would welcome having to describe the precise shape of the uppertail-covert feathers in order to rule out any hybrid characters and get a Black Duck accepted.

Carefully weighing up the available options, BBRC has decided to accept those Pine Buntings which show yellow on the primary fringes only, provided that the head pattern and other characters show no clear evidence of hybridisation. Equally, we will accept those birds where the primary colour was not seen, as long as the head pattern was described in sufficient detail to exclude any other hybrid features. This change in position will apply only to males; the differences between pure and hybrid females is so slight that we will continue to demand the previously published criteria for females (*Brit. Birds* 86: 378-386). We have also established the key head-pattern features required to separate pure Pine

Buntings from the majority of hybrid males:

- The presence of chestnut (not grey or black) on the lores;
- The presence of extensive chestnut on the throat region – the whole throat and malar area must be virtually concolorous, and there should be no prominent dark malar line or pale submoustachial stripe;
- The absence of a white supercilium – the supercilium should be chestnut or, at most, grey;
- The presence of any yellow on the head (or any other part of the bird, other than along the primary fringes) confirms hybrid origin.

As a result of these discussions, BBRC felt that the 1995 Fair Isle bird was now acceptable. This male, which was described in the literature as a hybrid (*Birding World* 8: 430-431), showed some yellow tones at the base of the outer webs of the primaries when close views were obtained, but no other evidence of hybrid origin. This record epitomised the dilemma facing BBRC: the yellow in the fringes was clearly seen with close views on the first day, but the following day, when the light was duller and the views not so close, they could not be seen. Had the bird been discovered a day later, it would probably already have been accepted! Many British records of male Pine Bunting are not seen well enough to clarify the precise colour of the primary fringes, although some previous records have suggested that yellow tones might have been present. For example, the bird on Fair Isle in October 1980 showed yellow in the primaries, and some photographs of the bird at Dagenham Chase, Greater London, in February/March 1992 suggested there might have been some yellow tones present. Also as a result of this review, and because the observers were unable to describe the head pattern fully, the 1994 Sanday record is considered no longer acceptable.

(Breeds temperate Russia from W Urals to upper Kolyma River, S to S Siberia, Mongolia, lower Amur River and Sakhalin. Isolated population breeds Qinghai and Gansu provinces, C China. Small isolated wintering populations regular W Italy and C Israel. Otherwise winters S of breeding range from Turkestan E through Himalayan foothills to C and E China, N of Yangtze.)

Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica* (23, 410, 7)

Orkney Westray, ♂, 28th May (M. G. Oxlade). North Ronaldsay, ♂, 28th May (H. Bell, P. A. Brown *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Northbay, Barra, 28th September (K. Gillon *et al.*).

Scilly St Mary's, 18th October, photo (J. Hopkins).

Shetland Fair Isle, ♂, 23rd May, photo (D. N. Shaw *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 254); another ♂, 29th May (T. C. R. Grant *et al.*). Foula, 23rd-26th September (A. R. & H. T. Mainwood *et al.*).

Records of this species have risen apace with increasing observer coverage and awareness, with 2.9 per year in the 1960s, 6.3 in the 1970s, 8.3 in the 1980s and no fewer than 20.0 per year in the 1990s. It is surprising that numbers have since fallen, with an average of only 9.0 per year since 2000. This mirrors a significant decrease in both South Korea and Japan (N. Moores pers. comm.; *J. Yamashina Inst. Ornith.* 34 (1)) and makes one wonder what is happening in their breeding areas. Nonetheless, those in 2003 fitted the established pattern of occurrence well.

(Breeds in boreal forest mires of N Eurasia from Sweden and Finland, E across N Russia to easternmost Siberia and Kamchatka, and S to Baikal region. European population migrates SE to winter in E China, Korean Peninsula and S Japan.)

Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola* (10, 208, 6)

Dorset Southwell, Portland, ♀ or first-winter, 3rd September, photo (P. A. Coe, P. & S. Saunders, G. Walbridge *et al.*).

Northumberland Farne Islands, ♀ or first-winter, 1st September (A. Ash, D. Steel *et al.*).

Orkney North Ronaldsay, ♀ or first-winter, 12th, 17th-18th September (P. A. Brown *et al.*).

Scilly Bryher, ♀ or first-winter, 21st-22nd September, photo (S. J. Dodgson).

Shetland Fair Isle, ♀ or first-winter, 7th-8th September (R. J. Nason *et al.*). Sumburgh Head, ♀ or first-winter, 26th September, photo (P. M. Ellis *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 421; 97: plate 368).

A good geographical spread of records, including the third for Dorset – the previous two in that county were also on Portland. Nonetheless, offshore islands remain the best bet for finding this species: Scilly has now recorded six, and Orkney nine, while the majority of Northumberland's 11

Hugh Harrop

368. Female or first-winter Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola*, Sumburgh Head, Shetland, September 2003.

records have occurred on the Farne Islands. Shetland still dominates though, with 147 of the 224 accepted records.

(European range restricted to small and declining population in C Finland, centred on Gulf of Bothnia. To E, breeds widely across Russia and Siberia to Kamchatka, S to NE China and NE Hokkaido. Winters locally from E Nepal through Himalayan foothills to NE India, and widely throughout SE Asia.)

Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala* (10, 158, 4)

Caithness St John's Loch, Brough, ♂, 28th June to 1st July, again 9th, photo (D. Glass, J. Smith *et al.*).
Orkney North Ronaldsay, ♂, 2nd-8th August (P. J. Donnelly, N. Gates *et al.*).
Pembrokeshire Skomer, ♂, 16th June, photo (J. G. Brown).
Sussex, West Sidlesham Common, ♂ in song, 13th-26th July, photo (M. Buchanan, R. Prior *et al.*).
2002 Lancs & North Merseyside Birkdale, Southport, ♂, 19th June (*Brit. Birds* 96: 605) to 22nd June (per S. J. White).
2002 Scilly Tresco, first-winter, 29th September to 3rd October, probably since 19th, photo (R. B. Bradbury, M. G. Telfer *et al.*).

(Breeds from C Italy to Greece, Turkey, N Iraq and W Iran, N through Caucasus to Ukraine and S Russia. Winters in W and C India.)

Bill Baston

369. First-winter male Baltimore Oriole *Icterus galbula*, Headington, Oxfordshire, December 2003.

Bobolink *Dolichonyx oryzivorus* (0, 24, 1)

Scilly Bryher, 16th-17th October, photo (R. Addison, M. Baynes, A. C. Lees *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 96: plate 422).

(Breeds widely across S Canada and N USA, S to NE California and New Jersey. Winters Peru to S Brazil and N Argentina.)

Baltimore Oriole *Icterus galbula* (1, 20, 1)

Oxfordshire Headington, first-winter ♂, 10th December to 16th January 2004, photo (P. Allen, R. Hurst, D. John *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 97: plates 61-63, 82 & 369).

Another overwintering bird, echoing the individuals in Pembrokeshire in 1989 and Essex in 1991/92 that similarly graced back-garden feeding stations. This confiding bird made the suburbs of Oxford an extremely popular venue for birders over the Christmas and New Year period, with many combining it with a visit to Cornwall for the American Robin *Turdus migratorius*. The last Baltimore Oriole appeared on Scilly in September 1999, an altogether more expected date and location for this stunning Nearctic visitor. An entertaining account of the Oxford bird appears in *Birding World* 16: 503-505.

(Breeds S Canada from C Alberta E to C Nova Scotia, S throughout E USA from N Texas to W South Carolina. Migrates to winter from S Mexico to Colombia and Venezuela.)

Appendix 1. Category D species accepted (see *Ibis* 136: 253)

Falcated Duck *Anas falcata*

2002 Suffolk Minsmere, ♂, 14th May to 10th June (W. Miles *et al.*).

(Breeds in E Siberia; winters N Indian subcontinent, E Asia, Japan, Korea.)

Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug*

Somerset Green Ore, first-year, 7th-15th April, photo (P. Burrows, D. Clothier, A. H. Davies, I. Stapp).

(Breeds across steppe region of Europe from E Austria, Hungary and Czech Republic E to Ukraine, throughout steppes of C Asia, E to E Mongolia and Tibetan plateau to Qinghai and Nei Mongol Autonomous Region, China.)

Appendix 2. List of records not accepted

This list contains all current records not accepted after circulation to the Committee. It does not include a) those withdrawn by the observer(s) without circulation, after discussion with the Hon. Secretary; b) those which, even if circulated, were not attributed by the observer(s) to any definite species; c) those mentioned in 'Recent reports' in *British Birds* if full details were unobtainable; or d) certain escapes.

In the vast majority of cases, the record was not accepted because we were not convinced that the identification was fully established; only in a very few cases were we satisfied that a mistake had been made.

2003 **Blue-winged Teal** Eyebrook Reservoir, Leicestershire, 20th September. **Ferruginous Duck** Minsmere, Suffolk, 5th July. **White-billed Diver** Near Heybridge Basin, Essex, 8th February; Gott Bay, Tiree, Argyll, 25th May; Newton Point, Northumberland, 26th August; Portree, Skye, Highland, 28th-30th October. **Wilson's Storm-petrel** North Sea, Sea area Humber, E of Donna Nook, Lincolnshire, 10th September. **Zino's/Fea's Petrel** Sheringham, Norfolk, 25th August; Brora, Sutherland, Highland, 29th August. **Squacco Heron** Hollowell Reservoir, Northamptonshire, 18th May. **Great White Egret** Holme, Norfolk, 13th February; Gwent Levels Wetland Reserve, Newport, Gwent, 17th-18th March; Deal Hall, Essex, 16th April; Theddlethorpe Dunes, Lincolnshire, 12th October; Laugharne Estuary, Carmarthenshire, 18th October. **Black Kite** Little Singleton, Lancashire & North Merseyside, 15th April; Bodham, Norfolk, 15th April; Wells-next-the-Sea, Norfolk, 15th April; Uplyme, Devon, 21st April; Epsom, Surrey, 22nd April; Great Braxted, Essex, 24th April; Pegwell Bay, Kent, 24th April; Aylmerton, Norfolk, 26th April; Pencoed, Bridgend, Glamorgan, 29th April; Messingham Heath, Norfolk, 4th May; Wormegay, Norfolk, 26th May; Barrington, Somerset, 27th May; Broughton, Buckinghamshire, 3rd June; Canterbury, Kent, 7th June; Rowntree Park, York, North Yorkshire, 22nd June; near Wilverley Plain, Hampshire, 25th June; Aveton Gifford, Devon, 11th August. **Pallid Harrier** Rowhedge, Essex, 26th May; Sandwick, Shetland, 7th November. **Red-footed Falcon** West Bergholt, Essex, 21st April; Holme, Norfolk, 12th May; Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, 28th May; Hadleigh, Essex, 30th May; Holkham/Burnham Overy, Norfolk, 1st June; Winterton Dunes, Norfolk, 16th June. **Eleonora's Falcon** Covehithe, Suffolk, 28th May. **Gyr Falcon** Rhyl, Flintshire, 29th January; Portknockie, Moray & Nairn, 9th February. **American Golden Plover** Earl's Palace, Birsay, Orkney, 10th October. **Great Snipe** St Agnes, Scilly, 24th October. **Marsh Sandpiper** Poolewe, Wester Ross, Highland, 17th April; Copperas Bay, Essex, 20th April; East Chevington, Northumberland, two, 14th July. **Bonaparte's Gull** Crediton, Devon, 16th February. **Gull-billed Tern** Landguard, Suffolk, 2nd May. **Caspian Tern** Southease, East Sussex, 20th June; Chelmsford, Essex, 13th September; Normandy, Hampshire, 10th October. **Whiskered Tern** Gosport, Hampshire, 14th April; Grafham Water, Cambridgeshire, 17th April. **White-winged Black Tern** Tophill Low, East Yorkshire, 15th August; St Mary's Island, Northumberland, 6th September. **Great Spotted Cuckoo** Holme, Norfolk, 5th November. **Alpine Swift** Aberystwyth, Ceredigion, 5th March. **Crag Martin** *Ptyonoprogne rupestris* Westport Lake, Staffordshire, 6th September. **Red-throated Pipit** Wilverley Plain, Hampshire, 17th March. **Buff-bellied Pipit** *Anthus rubescens* Levington, Suffolk, 4th-5th November. **Isabelline Wheatear** *Oenanthe isabellina* Papa Westray, Orkney, 13th-15th June. **Black-eared Wheatear** Cymystradlly, Caernarfonshire, 3rd May; Bognor Regis, West Sussex, 1st June. **Eyebrowed Thrush** *Turdus obscurus* Letham, Northumberland, 18th April. **Dark-throated Thrush** *T. r. ruficollis* Lavenham, Suffolk, 30th January. **Dark-throated Thrush** *T. r. atrogularis* Frampton-on-Severn, Gloucestershire, 25th October. **American Robin** Dalry, Ayrshire, 7th-8th January. **Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler** Bryher, Scilly, 2nd October. **Lanceolated Warbler** Fair Isle, Shetland, 11th September. **Savi's Warbler** Hickling, Norfolk, 15th April; Grafham Water, Cambridgeshire, 1st May. **Dusky Warbler** Collafirth, Shetland, 17th October; Whale Chine, Isle of Wight, 9th November. **Eastern or Western Bonelli's Warbler** Great Orme, Caernarfonshire, 2nd August. **Nutcracker** *Nucifraga caryocatactes* Leintwardine, Herefordshire, 29th-30th July. **Rustic Bunting** West Marden, West Sussex, 16th February. **Yellow-breasted Bunting** Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, 14th October. **Black-headed Bunting** North Sea, Sea area Dogger, oil installation Uisge Gorme, 30th April to 1st May.

2002 **'Black Brant'** Frieston Shore, Lincolnshire, 17th March, 3rd October. **Lesser Scaup** Lochs Ardvule and Bornish, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, 9th November to 2003. **Western Reef Heron** *Egretta gularis* Middlebere, Dorset, 14th-23rd August. **Great White Egret** Near Hauxton, Cambridgeshire, 11th October. **Black Kite** Roydon Common, Norfolk, 24th June. **Lanner Falcon** *Falco biarmicus* Seaford, East Sussex, 23rd March. **Gyr Falcon** Rendall, Orkney (second individual), 15th April. **Lesser Yellowlegs** Penclacwydd, Carmarthenshire, 15th July. **Spotted Sandpiper** Williamthorpe Reservoir, Derbyshire, 22nd October. **Bonaparte's Gull** Ardivachar Point, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, 28th April. **'American' Herring Gull** *Larus argentatus smithsonianus* St Mary's, Scilly, 30th January to 20th February; Barnes Wetland Centre, Surrey, 30th April. **Ross's Gull** Minsmere, Suffolk, 7th June (*Brit. Birds* 96: 607); previously published as 2001. **Pallid Swift** *Apus pallidus* Frodsham, Cheshire, 23rd June; Holy Island, Northumberland, 11th September; Cley, Norfolk, 26th October. **Little Swift** Woolston Eyes, Cheshire, 4th September. **Red-rumped Swallow** Waxham, Norfolk, 12th May. **Red-throated Pipit** Blacktoft Sands, East Yorkshire, 10th October; Bryher, Scilly, 20th October. **Citrine Wagtail** Wilstone Reservoir, Hertfordshire, 15th August. **Two-barred Crossbill** Fersness, Orkney, 20th August. **Baltimore Oriole** Dervaig, Mull, Argyll, 29th September.

2001 **'Black Brant'** Holbeach Marsh, Lincolnshire, 18th February. **King Eider** Burnham-on-Sea, Somerset, 21st October. **Night Heron** Brentwood, Essex, 12th May. **Black Kite** Lundy, Devon, 24th May. **American Golden Plover** Blacktoft Sands, East Yorkshire, 25th May; Maer Lake, Bude, Cornwall, two, 19th November. **White-rumped Sandpiper** South Ford, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, 26th-27th October. **'American' Herring Gull** Dungeness, Kent, 6th February. **Ross's Gull** Peel Castle, Isle of Man, 27th October. **Caspian Tern** Farnham Gravel-pits, North Yorkshire, 25th August. **Cliff Swallow** *Hirundo pyrrhonota* Sandwich Bay, Kent, 4th November. **Savi's Warbler** Bardsey, Caernarfonshire, 22nd August. **'Caspian' Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus scirpaceus fuscus* Filey, North Yorkshire, 10th-19th June.

2000 **White-billed Diver** Sound of Barra, Outer Hebrides, 6th May. **Little Shearwater** *Puffinus affinis* Hilbre Island, Cheshire, 6th September. **Gyr Falcon** Snishival, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, 21st March. **Semipalmated Sandpiper** Near Balgarva, Outer Hebrides, 9th September. **Baird's Sandpiper** West Gerinish, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, 11th-14th October. **Laughing Gull** Arnside, Cumbria, 9th October. **'American' Herring Gull** Swansea, Glamorgan, 30th January and 8th March; Kirkwall, Orkney, 2nd February; Rainham Marshes, Essex, 22nd December. **Gull-billed Tern** Near Balgarva, Outer Hebrides, 13th August. **Olive-backed Pipit** Foula, Shetland, 24th September; two, 6th October. **Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler** Foula, Shetland, two, 27th September. **Lanceolated Warbler** Foula, Shetland, 27th September. **'Caspian' Reed Warbler** Fair Isle, Shetland, 12th June to 1st July. **Booted Warbler** Castlebay, Barra, Outer Hebrides, 4th-5th September. **Dusky Warbler** Ardmore, Barra, Outer Hebrides, 21st October. **Collared Flycatcher** *Ficedula albicollis* Bardsey, Caernarfonshire, 26th September.

1999 **Canvasback** Monk's Wall, Kent, 10th-11th June. **'American' Herring Gull** Dunnet Beach, Caithness, 3rd February; East Tilbury, Essex, 6th February; Wick, Caithness, 9th February; Scrabster, Caithness, 6th-14th March; St Mary's, Scilly, 21st March; Walthamstow, Greater London, 23rd April; Southwold, Suffolk, 23rd April; Hayle, Cornwall, 31st September. **'Caspian Gull'** Dartford Marshes, Kent, three, 16th-17th January; Doonfoot/Greenan, Ayrshire, 30th-31st January; Redcar, Cleveland, 4th February; Westwood Great Pool, Worcestershire, 8th, 14th-15th February; another, 1st-2nd December; Ogston Reservoir, Derbyshire, 18th February; Martin Mere, Lancashire & North Merseyside, 6th March; Newquay, Cornwall, 11th March; Crosby Beach, Lancashire & North Merseyside, 18th August; another, 27th November; another, 11th December; Crosby Beach and Seaforth, 23rd November; Seaforth, 11th November; Dungeness, Kent, 15th-28th August; Withens Clough Reservoir, West Yorkshire, 11th September; Caistron, Northumberland, 17th October; Hanningfield Reservoir, Essex, 23rd November; Davidstowe, Cornwall, 28th November; Chew Valley Lake, Avon, 11th December; South Woodham Ferrers, Essex, 12th December. **'Siberian Stonechat'** Foula, Shetland, 30th September. **Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler** Foula, Shetland, 23rd September. **Dusky Warbler** North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 21st September.

1998 **White-billed Diver** Verran Island and Rubh Aird Mhichaeil, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, 6th, 8th May. **Cattle Egret** Chew Valley Lake, Avon, 9th June. **'American' Herring Gull** South Uist, Outer Hebrides, 31st March; Fishguard, Pembrokeshire, 1st-4th April. **'Caspian Gull'** Eling Great Marsh, Hampshire, 2nd February to 30th April; another, 18th April to 4th September; another, 28th August to 2nd September; another, 18th-27th December; Dungeness, Kent, 3rd February; another, 8th August; Milton, Cambridgeshire, 14th February; another, 22nd November; another, 24th December; Wandsworth, Greater London, 12th September; Old Moor, South Yorkshire, 6th November; Ogston Reservoir, Derbyshire, 2nd December. **Black-eared Wheatear** North Rona, Outer Hebrides, 15th

June. Common Stonechat *S. t. variegatus* Beachy Head, East Sussex, 8th-10th October. Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia straminea* Norfolk, Sheringham, 20th September. 'African Chaffinch' *Fringilla coelebs africana/ spodiogenys* Kendall, Cumbria, early January to 5th March; Penrith, Cumbria, 12th February; Fair Isle, Shetland, 5th April to 1st May; Wigton, Cumbria, 27th-28th April.

1997 Gyr Falcon Howmore, Outer Hebrides, 24th November. 'American' Herring Gull Walthamstow, Greater London, 27th December. 'Caspian Gull' Musselburgh, Lothian, 13th July; Doonfoot, Ayrshire 25th September; another, 2nd-6th October. Red-rumped Swallow Camel Estuary, Cornwall, 3rd September.

1996 Black Kite Southfield Reservoir, South Yorkshire, 4th April.

1994 Grasshopper Warbler *L. n. straminea* Holme, Norfolk, 2nd September; Red Rocks, Cheshire, 12th October. 'African Chaffinch' Fingringhoe, Essex, 9th-25th April, same 2nd-21st January 1995; St Mary's, Scilly, 12th April.

1993 South Polar Skua *Stercorarius maccormicki* Sea area Sole, SW of Scilly, 26th August. 'Caspian' Reed Warbler Spurn, East Yorkshire, 18th-19th September.

1992 'Caspian Gull' Doonfoot, Ayrshire, 1st August. Western Bonelli's Warbler Mountfield, East Sussex, 18th September. Yellow-breasted Bunting Out Skerries, Shetland, 26th September.

1984 'Caspian' Reed Warbler Spurn, East Yorkshire, 3rd June.

1979 Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* Black Rock, Stithians, Cornwall, 16th September to October.

1977 'Caspian' Reed Warbler Spurn, East Yorkshire, 24th September.

Appendix 3. List of selected records still under consideration

This list is not intended to be complete. Some decisions may have been arrived at and County Recorders/observers informed prior to the publication of this Report. Some other outstanding records are referred to in the Systematic List.

2003 White-billed Diver Lizard Point, Durham, 26th August. Black-browed Albatross Rerwick Head, Orkney, 3rd October. Pallid Harrier Unst, Shetland, 23rd-25th May. Pied Wheatear North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 17th-21st, 26th November. Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus alpestris* Honiton, Devon, 26th October. Dark-throated Thrush, Fair Isle, Shetland, 16th October. Blyth's Reed Warbler Barra, Outer Hebrides, 26th September; Fair Isle, Shetland, 28th September; North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 30th September to 1st October.

2002 'American' Common Eider *Somateria mollissima dresseri* Campbeltown Loch, Argyll, 18th October. Black-browed Albatross California Cliffs, Norfolk, 31st December. Elegant Tern *Sterna elegans* Dawlish Warren, Devon, 18th May, 8th and 18th-19th July, Torbay 19th July; Porthmadog, Caernarfonshire, 23rd-26th July and other reports in E Britain. Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti albiventris* Filsham, East Sussex, 19th October.

2001 Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina* Farlington Marshes, Hampshire, 9th October. Brown Skua *Catharacta lonnbergi* St Agnes, Scilly, 7th October.

2000 Canvasback Loch of Rummie, Sanday, Orkney, 21st-23rd June. Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* Dungeness, Kent, 20th May.

1999 Dunlin *Calidris alpina sakhalina* North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 21st May.

1998 'Wilson's Snipe' *Gallinago g. delicata*, St Mary's, Scilly, 9th October to 1999.

Selected records of Great White Egret (review: subspecies); all sand plover *Charadrius* records (review: species, subspecies); a small number of pre-2000 'Caspian Gulls'; a small number of 'American' Herring Gulls; all records and recent reports of 'Eastern' Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros phoenicuroides*, etc. (review); all records and recent reports of 'Ehrenberg's' Common Redstart *Phoenicurus p. samamisicus* (review); all records of Orphean Warbler *Sylvia hortensis* (review: subspecies); all reports of 'Desert' Lesser Whitethroats *Sylvia curruca minula*, etc.; all reports of 'Eastern' Common Whitethroats *Sylvia communis icterops*, etc.; all records of Isabelline Shrike (review: subspecies); a small number of 'African Chaffinches'.

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Notes

Great Crested Grebe rearing three broods in a year

In 1999, I kept watch on the single pair of Great Crested Grebes *Podiceps cristatus* which nested on Lacock Gravel-pits, Wiltshire. The grebes were present at the site from early February, with eggs incubated during March and three young hatched in early April. By 28th April, only two young remained and by the end of May a second clutch was being incubated. On 14th June, one adult was looking after two large young, while the second adult had two small young on its back. Sometime during mid July, the first brood left the site, and nest-building began again. On 18th August, the pair had two recently hatched young, as well as the two from the second brood. These young from the second brood eventually left the pits and, by 24th September, just the adults and two young from the third brood remained; all four were still present on 18th November. *BWP* states that Great Crested Grebes normally rear one brood, with two broods in up to 11% of pairs; there is no mention of this species being triple-brooded.

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Great Crested Grebe attacking Smew

On 23rd January 2002, at Corsham Lake, Wiltshire, I was watching a male Smew *Mergellus albellus* feeding when, after one of its dives, the duck suddenly leapt from the water as a Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* surfaced directly underneath it. The Smew landed about 10 m away, whereupon the grebe swam towards it, dived, and again surfaced underneath the Smew, which again took flight. The grebe subsequently swam back to join its mate. On both occasions I believe that physical contact occurred.

The Smew eventually began to feed again; both Common Pochards *Aythya ferina* and Tufted Ducks *A. fuligula* were also feeding in the same area, but were ignored by the grebe. Presumably the attacks represented early-season territorial behaviour, but I have been observing Great Crested Grebes for over 40 years and this is the first time that I have seen a duck attacked.

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110 Beanacre, Melksham, Wiltshire SN12 7PZ

Exceptional movement of Little Bitterns

On 1st September 2003, while staying at a hotel complex just northeast of Sunny Beach, Nesebŭr, Bulgaria, we witnessed a spectacular movement of Little Bitterns *Ixobrychus minutus.* Shortly after dusk, at approximately 20.15 hrs, we heard a distant frog-like croaking or quacking. As the sound got louder and closer, we realised that it was a bird, but it was not until it flew into view that we were able to identify it as a Little Bittern. Within seconds, more calls were heard, and 20-30 Little Bitterns were seen descending rapidly from the hillside down toward the bay. Almost as soon as these had disappeared, a group of at least 50 followed the same route, in turn followed by several further parties of ten or more, then smaller groups of four or five, finishing with just the occasional one or two birds after dark. Within a half-hour period we had witnessed a staggering movement of between 120 and 150 Little Bitterns! There could have been considerably more in the immediate area, as we were able to count only the birds moving overhead within 50-75 m east and west of us, owing to the failing light. Another guest at the hotel had also seen dozens of 'ducks' flying over during the same period, and it seems likely that these were also Little Bitterns, and were certainly additional to those we had counted. I was aware that Little Bitterns usually moved at night, but was quite unaware of such large concentrations of what were, presumably, migrants.

On this particular day, the weather conditions were suitable for the migration of large soaring birds. Earlier, I had counted c. 3,500 White Storks *Ciconia ciconia* moving to the southeast of Nesebŭr, just south of Sunny Beach. That same evening, we witnessed a large movement of Honey-buzzards *Pernis apivorus*, along with a few Common Buzzards *Buteo buteo*, in two or three groups totalling between 850 and 1,000 birds, moving southwest, along with a single White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus*. That day was the end of a particularly hot period, with daytime temperatures regularly exceeding 30°C. On 2nd September, the temperature was warm, but cloud cover gradually increased, and that evening the weather broke with a thunderstorm. No further large movements of any birds followed.

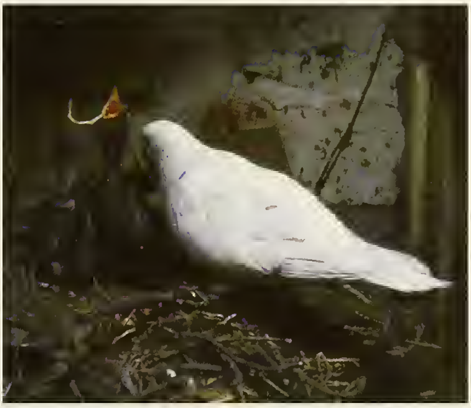
During our two-week stay in Bulgaria, these were the only Little Bitterns seen. *BWP* mentions a 'flock of 40-45 flying over Aboukir, Egypt, September 1944 (Bodenam 1945)' as being 'quite exceptional'.

Acknowledgments
I am grateful to James Hancock for an informed conversation regarding small heron migration.

Mike and Tanya Langman
38 Brantwood Drive, Paignton, Devon TQ4 5HZ

Domestic white dove feeding young Western Jackdaws

At the back of my house in Houlsyke, North Yorkshire, there is a small stone outbuilding in which I have made a wire-netting enclosure for our domestic white doves *Columba livia*. In spring 2003, a pair of Western Jackdaws *Corvus monedula* built their nest in this enclosure and reared three young from the five eggs laid. One of the female white doves took a great interest in the young jackdaws, and brooded them regularly while their parents were searching for food. At times, the dove actually fed the young jackdaws with the 'pigeon milk' that she would have fed to her own young.


Chris Pellant

370. Domestic white dove *Columba livia* feeding Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula* chicks, Houlsyke, North Yorkshire, 2003.

Chris Pellant
Fat Ox Farm, Houlsyke, Whitby, North Yorkshire YO21 2LH

Pied Wagtail opening an automatic door

On 22nd May 2003, I had picked up two American birdwatching friends, Bob Abrams and Joan Boudreau, from the airport, and on the way home we stopped at Reading services (West) on the M4 for breakfast. At about 07.00 hrs we were in an almost empty restaurant when we noticed a Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba* on the floor, running between tables and picking up scraps of food. After a while, the bird flew to the entrance lobby and waddled up to one of the closed doors. It looked slightly up and, to our astonishment, the door opened and the bird left. A few minutes later the door opened again and in came the same (or another) wagtail and proceeded to feed once more. It seemed that one or more of these wagtails had learnt how to activate the door to avail itself of a ready food supply.

Derek Moore
Rowan Howe, Gors Road, Salem, Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire SA19 7LY

Unusual feeding behaviour of Eurasian Treecreeper

Following the notes and editorial comment on Eurasian Treecreepers *Certhia familiaris* feeding below peanut feeders (*Brit. Birds* 96: 459), I wish to draw attention to two observations of Eurasian Treecreepers seen on nut feeders in Devon: one on 14th March 2001 at South Brent (by Mike Goss), and one on 17th January 2002 at Christow (per Richard Hibbert). The former record appeared in the *Devon Bird Report* 2001, the latter in the *Devon Bird Report* 2002.

Peter Reay
Editor, Devon Bird Report (preay@care4free.net)

Derek Moore and Roy Leverton both reported Eurasian Treecreepers *Certhia familiaris* feeding from peanut fragments under feeders, in Carmarthenshire and Banffshire respectively, in winter 2002/03 (*Brit. Birds* 96: 459). The editorial comment stated that these were perhaps the first documented reports of treecreepers exploiting peanut feeders.

In fact, as reported in *Scottish Bird News* (Vol. 67: 18), I also saw a Eurasian Treecreeper feeding from a peanut feeder in my garden at North Berwick, East Lothian, on three occasions between 9th and 30th January 2003. Although this species has been seen in the garden since, this behaviour has not been repeated here to date. Subsequent to the note being published, however, I have heard of other treecreepers feeding in this manner in Broughty Ferry, near Dundee, and at Kippen, Stirlingshire, also during winter 2002/03. In addition, a peanut-feeding Eurasian Treecreeper has been reported from a New Forest garden in February 1998, January 2002, and January-February 2003. Thus all records so far appear to have occurred during the winter months. It would seem that this behaviour is new and localised at present.

Mark Holling
The Old Orchard, Grange Road, North Berwick, East Lothian EH39 4QT

The two recent notes regarding Eurasian Treecreepers *Certhia familiaris* feeding on the ground beneath feeders (*Brit. Birds* 96: 459) originated from Wales and from Scotland. I observed similar behaviour regularly in my own garden in Buckinghamshire over a period of about a month between mid January and mid February 2003, although in this case the bird was feeding on scraps of sunflower seeds rather than peanuts. Over time, it seemed to become bolder, spending up to a minute feeding on open ground as much as 3-4 m away from the 'safety' of the nearest tree trunk, to which it would fly if disturbed. Although I have had feeders in similar positions for the past three winters, and have often seen a Eurasian Treecreeper in the garden, this is the first time that I have observed one feeding in this manner. If indeed the 2002/03 winter period is the first time that this behaviour has been noted generally, it is interesting that it should have occurred so widely across the country.

Phil Tizzard
Lampont, Stowe, Buckingham MK18 5AB

EDITORIAL COMMENT These notes, and the earlier ones referred to above (*Brit. Birds* 96: 459), suggest that this behaviour, although still unusual, may be becoming more widespread. Further observations of treecreepers feeding on or below peanut feeders in Herefordshire, Northeast Scotland, Somerset and Stirlingshire were also published in the autumn 2004 issue of *Birds* (p. 4). Consequently, we shall not publish further individual notes on this behaviour in Eurasian Treecreepers unless they relate to particularly unusual circumstances.

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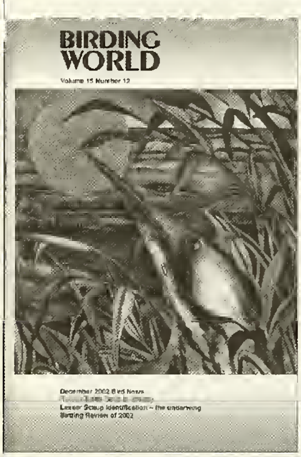

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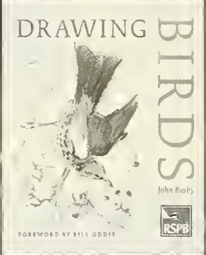

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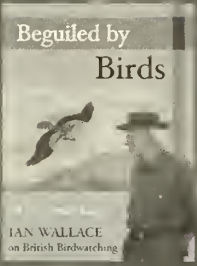

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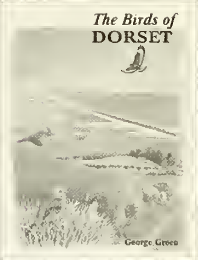

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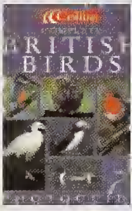

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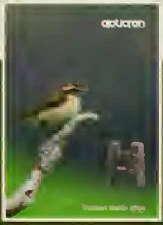

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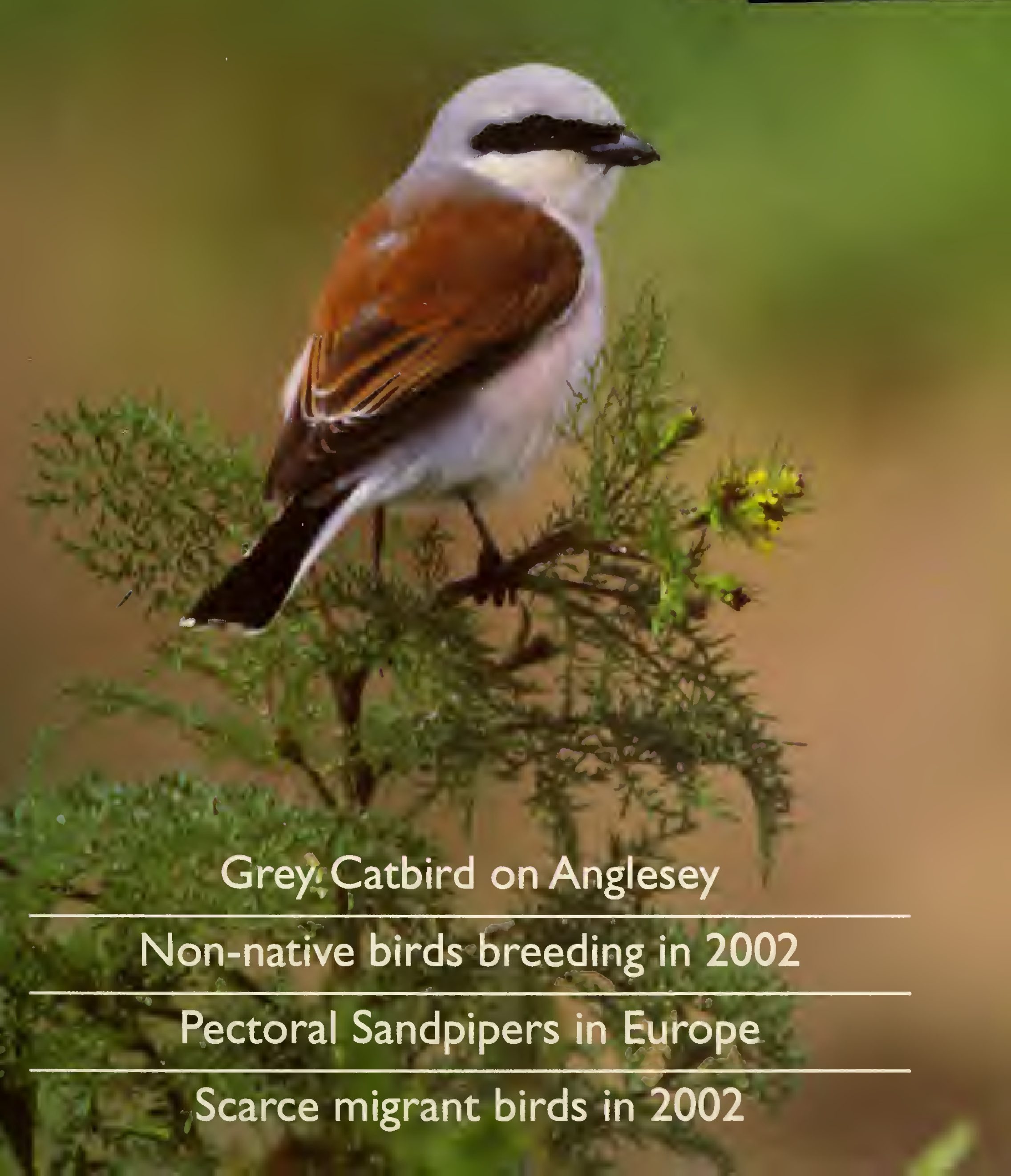

Grey Catbird on Anglesey

Non-native birds breeding in 2002

Pectoral Sandpipers in Europe

Scarce migrant birds in 2002

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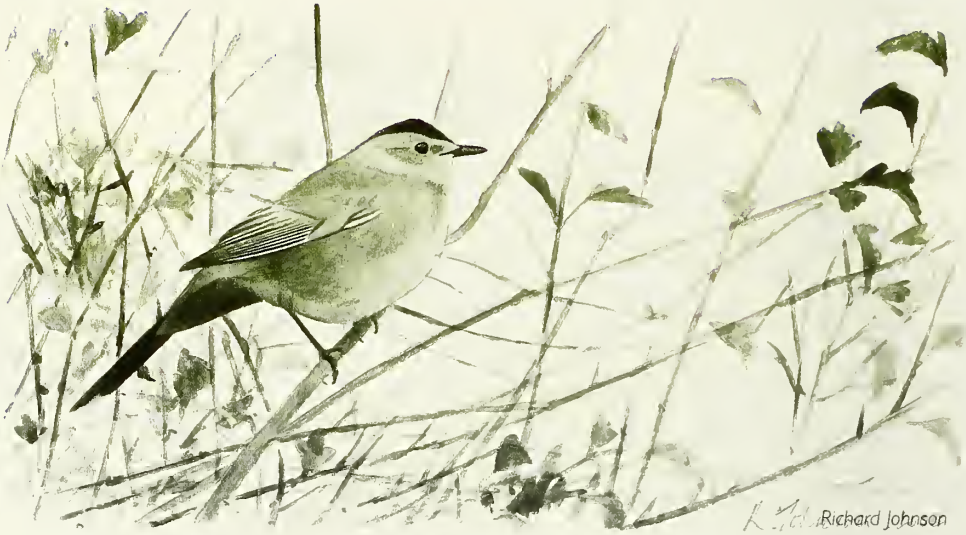
Grey Catbird on Anglesey:

new to Britain

Ken Croft



ABSTRACT Following the decision to separate the British and Irish Lists, the discovery of a Grey Catbird *Dumetella carolinensis* at South Stack, Anglesey, on 4th October 2001, represents the first record of this North American species in Britain. The Grey Catbird seen on Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork, on 4th November 1986, remains the first record for Ireland.

The morning of 4th October 2001 dawned cloudy, and with a southwesterly wind blowing, much as it had done for the previous week, and I began the day seawatching from the steps of the South Stack lighthouse at the western tip of Holy Island, Anglesey. After 30 minutes, during which time I had seen only a single Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*, my enthusiasm for seawatching had waned and my thoughts turned to passerine migrants – this was October after all – and I made my way inland a few hundred metres to the 'Plantation', a small stand of conifers interspersed with a few hawthorns *Crataegus* and elders *Sambucus*. This is an area which I check regularly each spring and autumn, and in the past I have discovered Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*, Pallas's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus* and Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva* here.

While walking up from the car park, slowly working my way to the waterworks compound adjacent to the Plantation, I failed to see a single bird. Finally, around 09.00 hrs, I glimpsed a movement in the hawthorns at the top end of the Plantation. In hope rather than expectation, I focused my telescope on the bird and saw that it was a Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*, but while I was watching it, another bird emerged from some ivy *Hedera* and appeared in the same field of view. It looked almost entirely blue-grey, except for the black crown and eye, and a long black tail. I stood there, quite stunned, as I realised that it could only be a Grey Catbird *Dumetella carolinensis*! Agonisingly, it then began to play cat-and-mouse with me, disappearing into the vegetation but then quickly emerging again. It continued to show on and off like this for five minutes or so, as it hopped about through the bushes. Unfortunately, a Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* then flashed past and behind it, not particularly close but sufficient for the catbird to dive deep into the cover of an elder bush. I waited a further ten minutes for it to reappear, but there was no sign.

At that point, I decided that I had better get to a telephone and put the news out. Having done so, I returned to the site, where five members of the South Stack RSPB staff had already raced across from their office and seen the bird in the elder. As they watched, it had flown across the adjacent field and into dense cover. Other birders soon began to arrive but the bird proved to be extremely elusive. Remarkably, given that the catbird was the first American passerine recorded on Anglesey, a Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus* was found that afternoon, but was of little consolation to most!

Although still present the following day, the Grey Catbird remained extremely unco-operative, spending much of the morning skulking in an area of thick gorse *Ulex*, being glimpsed just occasionally before diving back into cover, and calling infrequently. During the afternoon, it gradually became more obliging and was eventually seen by numerous birders.

Description

The Grey Catbird was of similar size to a Redwing *Turdus iliacus* (the two species were seen briefly, side by side, on the first morning), but with a slimmer, more elongated body shape and long, rounded tail. Its plumage was entirely uniform blue-grey except for its black tail and crown, and a distinctive chestnut-red patch on the vent (seen occasionally as the bird moved through the scrub with its tail raised). The bill was black, the iris and legs dark.

Status in North America

Grey Catbird is a summer visitor throughout the temperate regions of North America, extending north into the southern Canadian provinces, from Nova Scotia and southern New Brunswick, west to southern British Columbia. To the south, the breeding range lies largely to the east of the Rocky Mountains, south to central Arizona, northern Texas, the Gulf States and Florida. Almost the entire population is migratory, although some birds remain in southeastern USA throughout the year. The wintering range extends from the southeastern states of the USA and eastern Mexico, south through Central America to Panama and islands throughout the Caribbean Sea.

Being strongly migratory, transatlantic vagrancy would not be unexpected. In a study of the occurrence and frequency of Nearctic landbirds in the eastern USA during autumn migration between 1947 and 1976, Robbins (1980) predicted that Grey Catbird was the most likely of all previously unrecorded Nearctic landbird migrants to occur in Britain or Ireland. Although one subsequently appeared in Ireland in November 1986, it took a further 15 years before the species was finally recorded in Britain.

Weather conditions and associated species

October 2001 was not a good month for Nearctic landbirds in Britain, although the number and variety of species improved significantly in the second half of the month, and particularly so towards the end. Although the South Stack Red-eyed Vireo was the only other Nearctic landbird reported in Britain during the two-day period that the Grey Catbird was present, there was a Rose-breasted Grosbeak *Pheucticus ludovicianus* on Lundy, Devon, on 6th-9th October and a Red-eyed Vireo at Porthgwarra, Cornwall, on 7th-18th October (with two seen there on 13th only).

In the days leading up to 4th October 2001, an area of low pressure formed in the western North Atlantic. This gradually deepened as it moved northeast into the mid Atlantic, with associated strong southwesterly winds along its southern flank. Norman Elkins has suggested that, if the catbird was newly arrived on 4th October, it could have departed Nova Scotia or the northeast coast of the USA on the night of 30th September, flying to the southwest in anticyclonic conditions towards the developing depression. If it was then drifted to the northeast in the strengthening southwesterly winds to the south of this depression, by the following night it could have been about 750 km south of Newfoundland, placing it on the southeastern flank of the depression. The airstream in which the catbird was embedded indicates that the strong southwesterly winds could have taken the bird swiftly through the frontal system and into western Ireland by the night of 3rd October, and then on to Anglesey the following day. Subsequent arrivals, on 6th and 7th October, of American passerines sharing a similar breeding range with Grey Catbird (see above) may have also been associated with this system.

Occurrences within the Western Palearctic

Although the Anglesey Grey Catbird represents the first for Britain, there have been five previous records within the Western Palearctic. Of these, only three are from the modern era, with the other two dating from the nineteenth century. The first record of a transatlantic Grey Catbird came from the island of Helgoland, Germany, where one was shot by Oelrich Aeuckens on 28th October 1840 (Gätke 1895). More surprisingly, the second record came from mainland Germany, at Leopoldshagen, in May 1908 (Cramp 1988). In more recent times, one was discovered feeding with House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* on Jersey, Channel Islands, in mid October 1975. Although the finder actually trapped it and apparently held it in captivity for several weeks, it was not identified as a Grey Catbird until December of that year (*Brit. Birds* 74: 526-527). Photographs were taken, although these were not included with the published account. The fourth Western Palearctic record involved a bird on Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork, on 4th November 1986 (Preston 1989). Previously accepted as the first record for Britain & Ireland, the recent decision to separate the British and Irish Lists resulted in its removal from the former, but it still remains as the first record for Ireland. Finally, one was found at La Mareta, Tenerife, Canary Islands, on 1st November 1999 (Gantlett 2000).

An enterprising individual, which joined the cruise liner Queen Elizabeth II during passage from New York to Europe, remained on the ship during a visit to Southampton (Hampshire) on 21st October 1998 (*Birding World* 11: 468). As the rules stand, this ship-assisted traveller does not qualify for admission to the full British List.

Acknowledgments

Norman Elkins kindly supplied details of the weather conditions prevailing over the North Atlantic in the days leading up to the discovery of the Grey Catbird.

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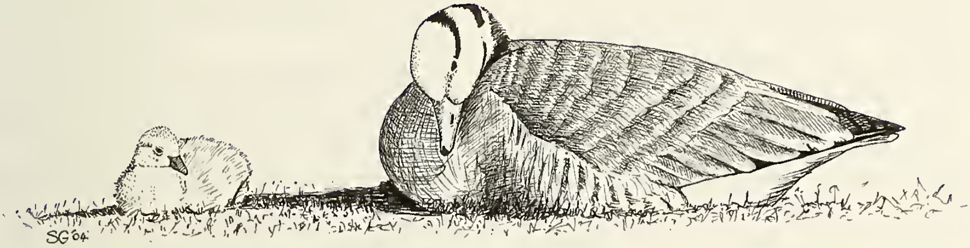
EDITORIAL COMMENT Colin Bradshaw, Chairman of the British Birds Rarities Committee commented: 'Given good views, the identification of Grey Catbird is not particularly difficult as there are really no confusion species (although BBRC has in the past considered a record of a claimed Grey Catbird and found it unacceptable as the description failed to exclude Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*). Describing a bird which is essentially a single colour, with the exception of the cap and undertail-coverts, is rather more challenging, as is obtaining decent views of this species. Anyone who has searched for Grey Catbirds away from High Island, in Texas, where they seem unusually showy, will remember their ability to disappear into a small amount of cover and remain still and unseen for ages, and will appreciate the frustration that Ken Croft felt initially.

'Of some concern is the fact that BBRC has not received details of the Red-eyed Vireo reported at the same site on 4th October 2001. Of course, it may have been that the observers saw this bird well enough to identify it but not well enough to submit a description, a situation which many of us would recognise. Nonetheless, if it was seen well, BBRC would welcome details of this important record, no matter how late.'

Eric Meek, Chairman of the British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee, commented: 'With four previous records from western Europe and one from the Canary Islands, it was only a matter of time before the occurrence of the first for Britain, and the South Stack record nicely confirmed the prediction of Robbins (1980). The elusive nature of the Anglesey bird proved frustrating for many observers and as a result there was no photographic evidence to support the record. Nonetheless, the descriptions submitted left no doubt as to the bird's identity and this, along with the fact that the bird was most unlikely to have been an escape, meant that the Committee was unanimous in accepting Grey Catbird onto the British List.'

Non-native birds breeding in the UK in 2002

Malcolm Ogilvie and the Rare Breeding Birds Panel



Bar-headed Geese *Anser indicus*. *Simon Gillings*

This is the seventh annual report by the Rare Breeding Birds Panel into the breeding of rarer non-native species in the UK, and covers the year 2002. Almost 300 species of non-native birds have been reported in the wild in Britain and about one-sixth of these have bred in the wild (Holmes *et al.* 1998; BOURC 2004). Since 1996, the Panel has monitored the establishment and spread of populations of these species, and the information gathered will assist conservation agencies and the Government to fulfil Article 8 of the Biodiversity Convention, and other international treaties, such as the EC Birds Directive, which stress the need to ensure that releases of non-native species are closely regulated and do not result in ecological conflicts with native fauna or flora.

As in previous years, coverage in 2002 was patchy, with considerable variation in the reporting of introduced and escaped birds in different parts of the country. Yet it is imperative that we learn more about our breeding non-native birds. Certain species, whether escapes from captivity or deliberate introductions, can create potentially serious conservation or even economic problems, and for this reason we urge observers to redouble their efforts in reporting the species described below to County Recorders and/or to the Panel.

The results of a new survey of naturalised geese breeding in the UK, carried out by WWT in 2000, were finally published in 2004 (Rowell *et al.* 2004), and are presented here for the appropriate species. They are compared with the Panel's data, and also with the results from an earlier national survey of naturalised geese, in 1991 (Delany 1993).

The current membership of the Panel is Humphrey Crick, Ian Francis, Judith Smith, Ken Smith, David Stroud and Malcolm Ogilvie (Secretary). The individual members of the Panel serve in a personal capacity, but three are also able to reflect the interests and needs of the respective sponsoring bodies. The work of the Panel is supported financially by the JNCC (on behalf of the country conservation agencies) and the RSPB, with additional support coming from the BTO.

It was with great sadness that the Panel learnt of the death of Colin Bibby on 7th August 2004. Colin had been a member of the Panel since 1990 but was forced to resign owing to ill health in April 2004. His knowledge and advice were invaluable and he played a key role in the development of the Panel into a major source of information of conservation importance.

Systematic list

Records of non-native species for which there was breeding or potential breeding activity in 2002 are included. In the case of the pheasants (Phasianidae), the presence of males in suitable habitat is sufficient to qualify a species for inclusion. The letter codes after the species' names are the categories used by the BOURC (BOURC 2004). The absence of a letter indicates that the species is not currently listed.

The following species, shown as Category C in the British List, are dealt with in the Panel's reports on rare breeding birds (e.g. Ogilvie *et al.* 2004): Gadwall *Anas strepera*, Red Kite *Milvus milvus* and Northern Goshawk *Accipter gentilis*.

Black Swan *Cygnus atratus* (E*)

Three localities in two counties: two pairs bred.
GREATER MANCHESTER Pair bred at Arley Hall but failed. Two immatures present, Elton Reservoir, early August, but origin unknown. SUSSEX Pair bred at Benbow Pond, Cowdray Park, and was seen with a downy cygnet on 11th August; fledging success was not reported.

This represents a considerable reduction on the nine or more breeding pairs in 2001. In four counties where breeding occurred in 2001, Devon, Lothian, Northeast Scotland and Orkney, it was confirmed that no breeding took place this year.

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus* (AE*)

Three localities in three counties: three pairs bred.
BEDFORDSHIRE A pair attempted to breed at Wardown Park, Luton. BERKSHIRE Pair with two young on 31st May, fledging success unknown. HIGHLAND Pair bred in Glen Strathfarrar, breeding success unknown.

These were the only reports of pairs believed to be of captive origin (see Ogilvie *et al.* 2004 for reports of assumed wild pairs).

Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus* (AE*)

No reports of breeding in 2002 were received. Rowell *et al.* (2004) found a total of 33 individuals at 20 sites in 2000. They also reported breeding by a pair at Horsey Island, Essex, and probable breeding in Leicestershire, neither of which was reported to the Panel. Their figure compares with a total of 88 birds at 29 sites in 1991 (Delany 1993).

White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons* (AE*)

One locality in one county: at least one pair bred.
ARGYLL Three full-winged pairs of the race *flavirostris* were present on Islay near a waterfowl collection, of which one pair definitely bred, rearing two young.

Rowell *et al.* (2004) found only seven adult birds (two *albifrons*, one *flavirostris* and four undetermined) at seven sites in 2000, none of them breeding, which is a considerable drop since Delany's (1993) total of 54 *albifrons* in 1991.

Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus* (E*)

Five localities in four counties: up to five pairs bred.
KENT Flock in Grove/Stodmarsh area, August-October, included at least three juveniles; possibly also bred in Wingham area. SUSSEX Two adults and two immatures were present in Chichester Harbour in late August and early September, but it is not known where breeding took place. WARWICKSHIRE Pair fledged one young on lake at Kineton. WILTSHIRE Pair bred at Edington Lake and reared four young.

No breeding apparently took place in either Derbyshire or Hampshire in 2002, where breeding has been fairly regular in past years. Reports of singles and small flocks were received from a number of counties. There were 52 birds at 18 localities in eight counties in 2000 (Rowell *et al.* 2004), with just one breeding pair, at Stratfield Saye, Hampshire. This record was not reported to the Panel at the time, but three other breeding pairs that year were. Delany (1993) reported 85 birds at 27 localities in 1991.

Snow Goose *Anser caerulescens* (AE*)

Two localities in two counties: 3-4 pairs bred.
HAMPSHIRE Although two pairs were reported from the regular breeding site of Stratfield Saye, it is not thought that breeding actually took place. ARGYLL On Coll, a flock of 24 adults and 10 goslings was rounded-up and ringed during their annual wing moult in July 2002. This was thought to be all the birds present on the island at the time, but it is not known whether there were any others elsewhere. This flock of 30-40 introduced geese moves between Coll and Mull during the year.

Rowell *et al.* (2004) reported a total of 86

Snow Geese at 17 sites during 2000, which compares with 85 at 27 localities found in 1991 by Delany (1993). Delany included the Coll/Mull flock in his total, however, which was not mentioned by Rowell *et al.*

Emperor Goose *Anser canagicus* (E)

No reports of breeding in 2002 were received. In 2000, 14 birds were found, all adults, at five localities (Rowell *et al.* 2004). In 1991, Delany (1993) also found 14 birds, at seven localities.

Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis* (AE*)

Breeding reported from at least nine localities in eight counties.

BEDFORDSHIRE A maximum of 28 young were present on Roxton Gravel-pit in early July, but it is not known how many fledged or how many pairs actually bred. A pair also bred at Harrold Gravel-pit and reared one young. CHESHIRE & WIRRAL Pair hatched one young at Tatton. DERBYSHIRE Pair fledged two young at Carsington Reservoir. HAMPSHIRE Eight pairs bred at the regular site of Stratfield Saye, with up to 20 young seen. HIGHLAND Pair bred at Tarbat House, Dornoch Firth, but success unknown. NORFOLK Pair bred successfully at Ditchingham Gravel-pit, but number of young not reported. SUFFOLK Twelve small young seen on Sotterley Park lake in early June; number of pairs involved not reported. Breeding suspected elsewhere in county. WARWICKSHIRE Three pairs bred on lake at Priors Marston, success unknown.

The 2000 survey (Rowell *et al.* 2004) found a total of 693 birds at 75 sites. Details of the number and location of all the breeding sites are not given, but 129 of the total were juveniles with breeding confirmed in Cumbria, Essex and Hampshire, among others. The Panel's report for 2000 (*Brit. Birds* 95: 631-635) included breeding records for those three counties, and also a further five. Although several flocks appear to be flourishing, the total found in 2000 is well down on the 925 at 89 localities reported by Delany (1993).

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus* (CE*)

Minimum of 43 localities in seven counties: at least 33 breeding pairs recorded.

BERKSHIRE Breeding reported from Windsor Great Park (two pairs), the River Thames at Caversham (two pairs), Dinton Pastures Country Park (four pairs) and Theale Gravel-pits (two pairs), with young produced at each locality. GREATER MANCHESTER Pair fledged two young at Compstall Water. HAMPSHIRE Up to six pairs at four localities, but breeding not confirmed. LEICESTERSHIRE Five pairs raised 15 young at Rutland Water. NORFOLK Breeding reported from 17 localities, but no estimate of the total number of pairs involved. SUFFOLK Up to 17 pairs breeding at 14 localities. WARWICKSHIRE Single pairs at two localities, both in suitable habitat, but breeding not reported.

Coverage remains disappointingly patchy. In 2000, a total of 575 was found at 43 localities (Rowell *et al.* 2004), with the majority (444) in Norfolk and a further 64 in Suffolk. In fact, only one breeding locality away from Norfolk and Suffolk was listed, though the Panel's report for 2000 (*Brit. Birds* 95: 631-635) records breeding in six other counties. In 1991, the total recorded was 906, with Norfolk holding over 800 of these (Delany 1993). It is not known whether this is a genuine reduction in numbers or simply whether coverage in Norfolk was less thorough in 2000.

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* (BE*)

No reports of breeding in 2002 were received.

Muscovy Duck *Cairina moschata* (E*)

Three localities in three counties: at least four pairs bred.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE The population at Ely numbered at least 19 adults during the summer and a minimum of ten young were seen. DERBYSHIRE Up to 11 adults and 15 young (broods of eight and seven) were present at Bradford Dale in late July. NORFOLK Pair fledged one young at Broom Heath.

No breeding took place in either Cheshire or Devon where this species was reported in 2001 (*Brit. Birds* 96: 620-625). Records of non-breeding birds were received from a number of other counties. This species is not simply a farmyard duck and all records are useful in establishing the national picture.

Wood Duck *Aix sponsa* (E*)

Two localities in two counties: pair bred, three other pairs reported.

LANCASHIRE & NORTH MERSEYSIDE Pair present in suitable habitat. WILTSHIRE Pair bred at Stanton Park and fledged one young;

two other pairs present in early March.

Singles were seen in at least five other counties.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina* (AE*)

Five localities in four counties: at least five pairs.
GLAMORGAN Pair displaying at Roath Park Lake in early April. GOWER Pair at Eglwys Nunydd in late March. LINCOLNSHIRE Pair at Langtoft Gravel-pits in April and 12 birds in September. NORFOLK Two young seen in May at Pensthorpe, where there is a free-flying population, and two males and a female at nearby Great Ryburgh in April and June.

Once again, our annual plea for data from the well-known population in the Cotswold Water Park has gone unheeded. Information from this site would be extremely valuable.

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula* (A)

No reports of apparently escaped or introduced birds in 2002 were received.

Helmeted Guineafowl *Numida meleagris* (E)

Six localities in three counties: no confirmed breeding.
DEVON Five together in a field in August. NORFOLK There were no reports from the breeding locality of 2001, but two were seen about 12 km from that site, in August. Two males and a female seen at another locality in April and single pairs at two (separate) nearby localities, one in June and the other in December. SOMERSET A free-flying flock is well established at Ash Priors, but no reports of breeding were received.

This species may be increasing in popularity as a species to keep, and release.

Reeves's Pheasant *Syrmaticus reevesii* (E*)

Six localities in three counties.
NORFOLK Males reported from three sites within the Stanford Training Area, including two displaying in late July at one and seven males in September at a second; sightings from three other localities. SOMERSET Small numbers present at Ash Priors throughout the summer. WILTSHIRE Three males present at Druid's Lodge estate in early May.

Green Pheasant *Phasianus versicolor*

Three localities in one county.
NORFOLK Up to 12 males at Worstead all year; also reported from Frettenham, in late March and early April, and North Walsham, in early April (two).

This species was first reported to the Panel in 2000, from the same general area of northeast Norfolk, where it appears to be persisting, though the above localities are up to 10 km west of the original release site.

Golden Pheasant *Chrysolophus pictus* (CE*)

21 localities in five counties: minimum of 64 birds involved.
DEVON Single males, one killed by a car, at two localities. LANCASHIRE & NORTH MERSEYSIDE Nine males and a female seen in Lytham Hall Woods. NORFOLK Reported regularly from three localities, Wayland Wood (up to 11), Hockham Woods (10) and Wolferton (3), plus one or two sightings of 1-5 birds (total 15) at seven other localities. SUFFOLK Six males seen in five different localities. SUSSEX Three pairs and a single bird reported from three localities.

The Norfolk total of 39 compares with 49 in 2000, the last year for which there were good figures. The Sussex total is incomplete as the three estates which held up to 45 pairs in 2000 were not surveyed this year.

Lady Amherst's Pheasant *Chrysolophus amherstiae* (CE*)

Present in two counties, which still hold the two main populations of this species.
BEDFORDSHIRE At least 15 different birds seen in several localities. BUCKINGHAMSHIRE Still present but no counts. A total of 85 territories was identified in this county in 1998.

Common Peafowl *Pavo cristatus* (E*)

This species was seen in five localities in Norfolk, but no breeding was reported. Common Peafowl bred in Northamptonshire in 1998 and 1999, and two were seen at Winfarthing, Norfolk, in 2001.

Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* (AE*)

Two localities in two counties: two full-winged populations.
NORFOLK Free-flying birds from the colony at

Great Witchingham Park continue to be seen outside the park in small numbers. LOTHIAN No young were left full-winged at Edinburgh Zoo.

Alexandrine Parakeet *Psittacula eupatria* (E*)

No reports of breeding were received in 2002.

Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* (CE*)

Breeding in at least five counties: total population 6,000+.

The summary of breeding numbers in the counties of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Kent, Middlesex and Surrey in the Panel report for 2001 cannot be improved upon, as the study upon which it was based (Butler 2002) ended prior to the 2002 breeding season. Very few were seen in Sussex, and no breeding was reported. The five main winter roosts, at Esher, Lewisham, Reigate, Ramsgate and Maidenhead, were counted during winter 2001/02 and held a total of 6,004 birds (Butler 2002). Sightings of small numbers of birds were reported from Cheshire, Norfolk and Suffolk.

Rosy-faced Lovebird *Agapornis roseicollis* (E)

One locality: pair bred.

LOTHIAN Pair bred at Dunbar, an adult and juvenile being present during January to April, with five birds seen on 3rd April, and another juvenile present on 5th August.

This is the first reported breeding by this species in the wild, and the second successive year that a new species of parrot has bred in the UK (the first breeding of Blue-crowned Parakeet was reported in 2001). Rosy-faced Lovebird is a native of Angola, Namibia and South Africa.

Blue-crowned Parakeet *Aratinga acuticaudata*

No reports of breeding were received in 2002, although there were seven together in the Lymington area of Hampshire from September to December. Last year's attempted breeding in Kent was not repeated.

Monk Parakeet *Myiopsitta monachus* (E*)

Two localities in two counties: breeding at one.

HERTFORDSHIRE The Borehamwood population numbered at least 35 birds and breeding was known to occur, but there was no count of nests. WILTSHIRE A small colony was reported from Castle Combe, with up to eight birds in March, but no information was received on breeding. These birds have apparently been present in the village for at least two years.

Scattered records suggest continuing escapes of this species, but no other breeding populations are known. Previous colonies existed at Tiverton, Devon, and Barnton, Cheshire, but then died out.

Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo* (E*)

The pair that has been breeding at a location in northern England since 1996 reared two young in 2002. Reports of single birds were received from Highland, Norfolk and Warwickshire (a long-staying individual, but not seen after February). This is the seventh year running in which this pair in northern England has bred, but there have been hardly any reports of the 15 young reared to date. Birdwatchers are encouraged to submit all records of this species from the UK, whether breeding or not.

Red-winged Laughingthrush *Garrulax formosus*

In the Isle of Man, escapes from a wildlife park have been living in the wild for several years, with breeding taking place since at least 1996 (including in 2002).

Acknowledgments

The Panel is grateful to all County Recorders, report editors and individuals who supplied the information from which this report has been compiled.

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Pectoral Sandpipers in Europe:

vagrancy patterns and the influx of 2003

Alexander C. Lees and James J. Gilroy

Ben Green

ABSTRACT Unprecedented numbers of Pectoral Sandpipers *Calidris melanotos* were reported in Britain & Ireland during autumn 2003, and to a lesser extent throughout the rest of Europe as well. This paper presents a review of the occurrence patterns and migratory behaviour of the species, both during the 2003 influx in Europe, and on a wider scale. Potential explanations for the unexpected regularity of this species in Europe, given its relatively small global population size and predominantly overland migration strategy, are discussed. It is suggested that the routes and wintering grounds used by Pectoral Sandpipers are more dynamic than was previously acknowledged.

The autumn of 2003 produced the largest influx of Pectoral Sandpipers *Calidris melanotos* ever recorded in Britain & Ireland, with at least 261 birds reported (figs. 1 & 2; data compiled from reports at www.birdguides.com). Although these are unchecked reports, which have not been assessed by county or local records committees, the overall pattern they show of the influx is likely to be broadly accurate. By comparison, the previous highest annual totals were of 132 records in 1999, 131 in 1984 and 91 in 2000 (Peter Fraser *in litt.*); note that these totals refer to accepted records only, and exclude Irish records. Mean annual totals of Pectoral Sandpipers recorded in Britain in the last three decades are 40 during 1968-79, 70 during 1980-89 and 57 during 1990-99 (Fraser & Rogers 2003). These numbers serve to underline the species' status as the most frequent Nearctic vagrant to Europe (Hayman *et al.* 1986; Lewington *et al.* 1991). Interestingly, it is far from the commonest migratory wader in North America. A recent estimate put the world population at 400,000 individuals – comparable with that of White-rumped Sandpiper *C. fuscicollis*, but a fraction of the estimated 3.5 million Semipalmated Sandpipers *C. pusilla*, for example (Morrison *et al.* 2001). In these terms, the relatively high frequency with which Pectoral Sandpipers occur in Europe is quite surprising. In this paper, we attempt to evaluate the potential factors which may be responsible for this species' predisposition to vagrancy. In particular, we investigate the species' occurrence pattern in Britain and Europe, before relating this to what is known about its migration strategies in the rest of the world.

Pectoral Sandpiper has an extensive breeding range, stretching from Hudson Bay westwards across the North American tundra and into Siberia, where it breeds west to the Yamal Peninsula, immediately to the east of the Ural mountains (Snow & Perrins 1998; Zockler & Lysenko 2000). Since the 1980s, breeding has also been suspected within the boundary of the Western Palearctic, in European Russia, suggesting a more extensive breeding range than was previously thought (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). The bulk of the population winters in southern South America, from southern Bolivia, Paraguay and northern Argentina to southern Argentina (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996). Small numbers also reach southeast Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand, these presumably being of Siberian origin, migrating down the western Pacific fringe. Small wintering populations have also been recorded on islands in the central Pacific, including Hawaii and the Phoenix group (Hayman *et al.* 1986). Vagrants have occurred widely, reaching Africa, the Middle East, India and east Asia, reinforcing the status of this species as a truly global wanderer (Hayman *et al.* 1986; Urban *et al.* 1986; Shirihai 1996; Eguchi *et al.* 2000; Carey *et al.* 2001; Undeland & Sangha 2002).

Pectoral Sandpipers in Britain & Ireland and Europe

In autumn, records of Pectoral Sandpipers in Britain & Ireland tend to follow a clear temporal and regional pattern. During July and August, there is an eastern bias to the distribution of new arrivals (predominantly adults), while in September and October, the picture is of a broader geographical spread, with generally higher numbers of birds and a preponderance of juveniles. In 2003, the overall pattern of records was broadly typical. After the first record, at Maer Lake, Cornwall, on 2nd July, the passage of adults showed a small peak from approximately 15th to 25th July (fig. 1). Although there were some exceptions, including several Irish records, the spatial pattern of these early migrants showed a distinct easterly bias (fig. 2a). The bulk of records in 2003 occurred in September, however, with a clear peak between 2nd and 22nd. The majority of these

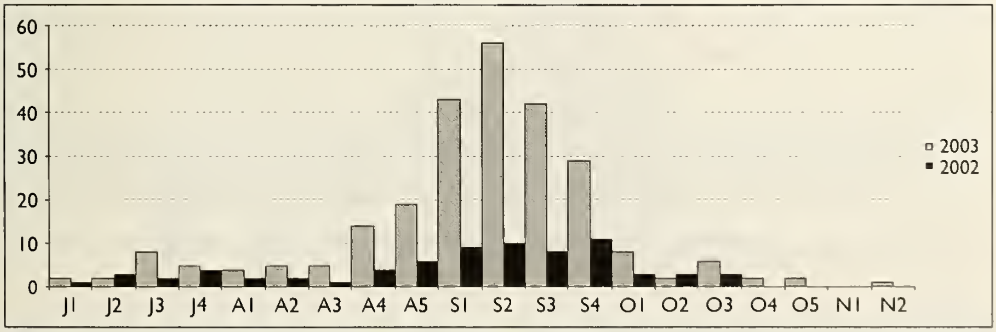

Fig. 1. Comparison of the number of Pectoral Sandpipers *Calidris melanotos* reaching Britain & Ireland each week during the autumns of 2002 and 2003. The weekly totals (seven-day periods from 1st July, so that J1 = 1st-7th July, J2 = 8th-14th July, J3 = 15th-21st July, J4 = 22nd-28th July, A1 = 29th July to 4th August, etc.) represent all new arrivals, although there is likely to be some duplication as a result of individuals moving between sites. Data are unchecked reports derived from BirdGuides (**www.birdguides.com**) and have not been assessed by county or local records committees.

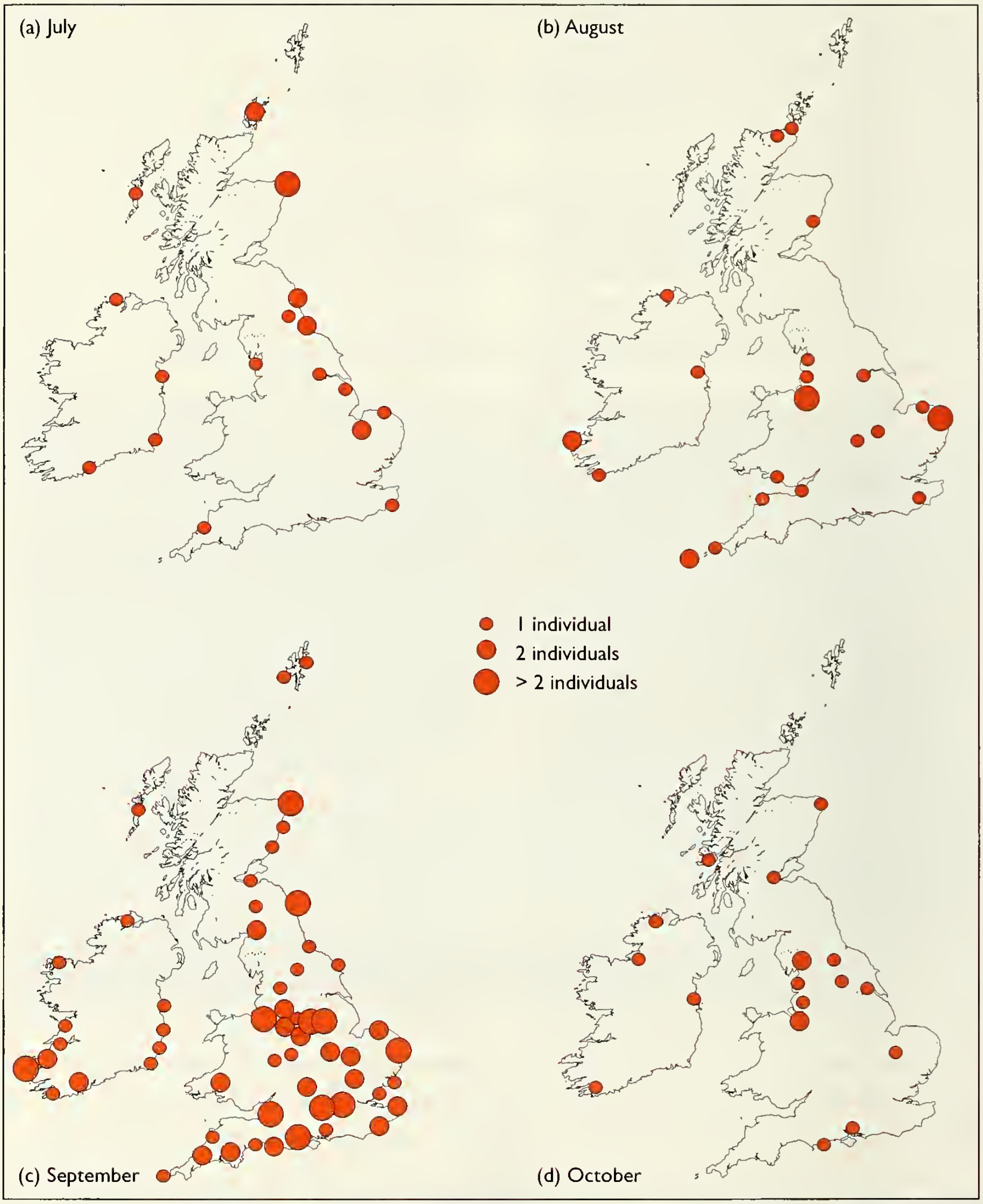

Fig. 2. Distribution of Pectoral Sandpipers *Calidris melanotos* in Britain & Ireland in autumn 2003. Dots represent new arrivals only in each month. Data are unchecked reports derived from BirdGuides (www.birdguides.com) and have not been assessed by county or local records committees.

were juveniles, and fig. 2c reveals a much wider geographical spread, suggesting a broad-front movement across Britain during this period. New arrivals tailed off quickly in October, with records concentrated in western parts of Britain, and Ireland (fig. 2d). Consequently, the temporal and spatial patterns of the influx in 2003 were familiar; it was the magnitude of the influx which was notable.

Many other countries in Europe also reported record numbers of Pectoral Sandpipers in the autumn of 2003, although the numbers involved were considerably smaller than those in Britain & Ireland. A clear temporal pattern was again evident, with birds arriving in northern Europe from the third week in July, and slowly filtering down into central and southern Europe as the autumn progressed (fig. 3). This general pattern fits the known migratory strategy of Pectoral Sandpiper, with overland movements in autumn being made slowly via short hops (Piersma 1987; Farmer & Wiens 1999). Given the abundance of suitable habitat in continental Europe, the actual number of birds involved in autumn 2003 was likely to have been much higher than the data suggest.

Unusually large displacements of migrants are most likely to occur as a result either of exceptional weather conditions, or of a sharp increase in population levels following a particularly successful breeding season (e.g. Moss 1995, Veit 1997). The influx of Pectoral Sandpipers in Britain & Ireland in 2003 was spread over an extended time period, with large numbers being discovered almost daily throughout September (fig. 1). Various weather systems were prevalent over Europe during this period, suggesting that no single weather pattern could account for the influx. Fig. 1 also presents a comparison of numbers in 2003 with those of a more 'normal' year (2002). This shows that passage in July and early August, involving mainly adult birds, was of a similar magnitude in both years. The main difference between 2002 and 2003 was the higher number of juveniles which arrived in late August and throughout September. By early October 2003, the number of new arrivals was greatly diminished, and numbers were again comparable with those in 2002. This suggests that Pectoral Sandpipers enjoyed a successful breeding season, combined with high levels of juvenile survival and recruitment within the source area of European vagrants. The proximate mechanism by which these birds arrived in Europe is, however, more open to debate.

Like most Nearctic vagrants, Pectoral Sandpipers are generally believed to arrive on the eastern side of the Atlantic as a result of wind-drift (Nisbet 1959; Moss 1995; Cottridge & Vinicombe 1996), or perhaps even in the jet stream (Elkins 1988). This explanation holds well for those which turn up in September and October, when regular Atlantic depressions inevitably drag many inexperienced individuals (mostly juveniles) off course. The passage of adults in early autumn is, however, more difficult to explain. The more experienced adults are thought less likely to be affected by wind-drift (Moss 1995), while fast-moving depressions are unusual during July and August.

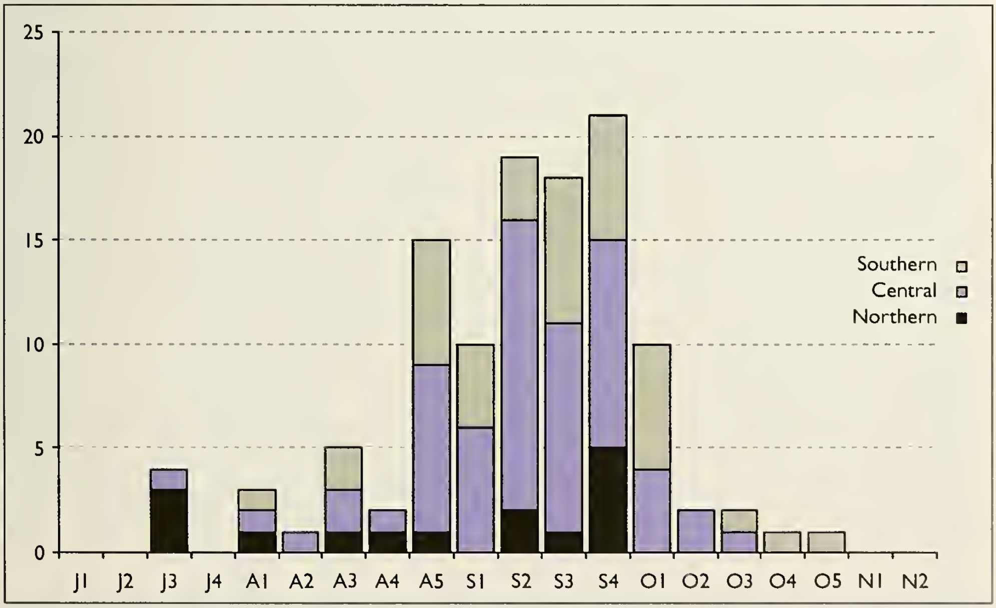

Fig. 3. Temporal distribution of Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* records in Europe (excluding Britain & Ireland) in autumn 2003. Countries are grouped regionally (values in parentheses indicate number of records). Southern Europe includes Switzerland (5), Italy (7) and Spain (26); Central Europe includes Poland (6), Germany (14), France (30) and Hungary (11); Northern Europe includes Iceland (4), Norway (7) and Finland (4). Many records are still awaiting acceptance by national records committees. Data presented in seven-day periods from 1st July, so that J1 = 1st-7th July, J2 = 8th-14th July, etc.

Alex Lees

371. Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*, Seal Island, Nova Scotia, Canada, 18th October 2002. These late migrants may be Siberian breeders on a Great Circle route to South America (Hayman *et al.* 1986), staging in Atlantic Canada before embarking on a direct sea crossing to South America.

Other authors have proposed alternative causes for the appearance of adults in early autumn. Sharrock (1971) postulated that the summer adults could be re-orientating individuals that crossed the Atlantic in the previous autumn and spent the summer in northern Europe. Both Lewington *et al.* (1991) and Toms (2002) suggested that a proportion of adult Pectoral Sandpipers reaching Britain in early autumn may originate from Siberian breeding grounds. Given that their arrival frequently coincides with the appearance of adult Little Stints *C. minuta* and Curlew Sandpipers *C. ferruginea* along the North Sea coast, species which share breeding grounds with Pectoral Sandpipers in western Arctic Siberia, this would seem to be the most likely origin. When considering the similar pattern of occurrence found in White-rumped Sandpipers, Cottridge & Vinicombe (1996) suggested that adults migrate with flocks of waders, such as Ringed Plovers *Charadrius hiaticula* and Dunlins *Calidris alpina*, heading south from their breeding grounds in Greenland, and that these commoner species then act as carriers.

So far, these hypotheses have been raised only in speculation, and the occurrence pattern of Pectoral Sandpipers has not been discussed in detail. In the remainder of this paper, we will attempt to explore this pattern more fully, particularly through a discussion of the 'normal' migration strategy for this species.

Pectoral Sandpiper migration strategy

The migratory routes of Pectoral Sandpipers in North America are relatively well understood, and present an interesting paradox in relation to the pattern of occurrence in Europe. The species has been classified as a 'narrow-band migrant', with 90% of the population migrating south along a relatively narrow corridor through interior North America (Skagen *et al.* 1999). Birds do not tend to concentrate at particular spots en route but rather make use of several feeding stops punctuated by short migratory hops (Piersma 1987; Farmer & Wiens 1999). A smaller proportion follow a coastal route along the eastern seaboard of North America. Most of these use staging grounds along the coasts of eastern Canada and north-east USA, prior to a direct crossing of the western North Atlantic to South America (Cramp & Simmons 1983; Lewington *et al.* 1991). This latter route – the most likely source of wind-drifted European vagrants – is, therefore, a secondary route, followed by a small fraction of the overall population.

The fact that the Pectoral Sandpipers migrate primarily through interior North America is borne out by the relatively low numbers of this species at eastern seaboard localities (Godfrey 1966). A long-term study by McLaren (1981) on Sable Island, off Nova Scotia, found Pectoral Sandpiper to be only the twelfth-commonest wader during the period 1967-79. A total of just 227 individuals was noted over this period, compared with 1,927 White-rumped Sandpipers and 1,415 American Golden Plovers *Pluvialis dominica*. Given the location of this island, some 180 km east of the Nova Scotia coastline (and on a potential flight line between Nearctic wader staging grounds and western Europe), one might expect the numbers of migrant waders to occur in similar proportion to those reaching Europe. Evidently this is not the case and, if wind-drift is indeed the principal cause of transatlantic vagrancy, the regularity of Pectoral Sandpipers in Europe becomes even more surprising.

The migratory strategy of Pectoral Sandpipers from the Siberian breeding population adds a further twist to the story. The breeding range of Pectoral Sandpiper in Siberia is almost as extensive as that in North America, suggesting that a surprisingly high proportion of the world population may breed in the Old World (Hayman *et al.* 1986; Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). This population apparently uses the same South American wintering grounds as the Nearctic population, since there have been recoveries in Siberia of birds ringed in Saskatchewan and Kansas during autumn migration, which also explains the fact that juvenile Pectoral Sandpipers are unexpectedly late migrants through North America (Cramp & Simmons 1983; Paulson 1993; Toms 2002). Siberian breeders must, therefore, migrate north and east from their breeding grounds in autumn, across the Arctic Ocean to northern Canada, before joining the 'normal' route through North America. Some are thought to use the North American Pacific coast as a flyway, but the majority are believed to follow the same routes as North American breeders (Paulson 1993). This route takes Siberian breeders on a staggering 16,000-km odyssey, navigating across three continents, to their wintering grounds (Cramp & Simmons 1983). Wind-drift is unlikely to carry the individuals using this route towards Europe, although the difficulty of using magnetic navigation cues at high latitudes might predispose Siberian breeders to vagrancy (Alerstam & Gudmundsson 1999).

The pattern of occurrence of Pectoral Sandpipers in Europe poses several conundrums. How can a species with a relatively small population size and a predominantly overland migration route through the American midwest become the most frequently occurring Nearctic vagrant in Europe? Why do so many adults reach Britain & Ireland in early autumn, especially during periods when weather-related drift is unlikely? Why is there a North Sea coast bias to these early autumn records? Why do Pectoral Sandpipers farther east in Europe tend to occur in spring? None of the hypotheses mentioned so far can fully account for these patterns. Potentially, a more satisfactory explanation comes from the theory of pseudovagrancy, i.e. that many of the Pectoral Sandpipers reaching Europe are actually performing a regular and viable migration to established wintering grounds in the Old World (e.g. Gilroy & Lees 2003).

David Tipling/Windrush

372. Juvenile Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*, Bough Beech Reservoir, Kent, September 2003. Present from 12th to 17th September, this individual was one of many juveniles that contributed to the extraordinary peak of records in early to mid September 2003 (see fig. 1, p. 639).

An American pseudo-vagrant?

Many authors have suggested that a proportion of wind-drifted Pectoral Sandpipers could successfully overwinter on the 'wrong' side of the Atlantic (e.g. Urban *et al.* 1986, Lewington *et al.* 1991, Toms 2002). Alerstam (1993) noted that Pectoral Sandpipers are often encountered in circumstances which 'suggest normal migration through Europe'. The large number of records, the relatively high frequency of adults, and the small but predictable spring passage are all indicative of the existence of a small population moving through western Europe on an annual basis. The consistency of arrivals between years is perhaps also a strong indicator of a regular migration. Pectoral Sandpipers are capable of making extremely long migratory journeys, including major sea crossings, and are not particularly specific in their habitat requirements (Hayman *et al.* 1986). It is not inconceivable that suitable wintering habitat in the Old World could be successfully utilised by vagrant individuals. Could Europe even be part of a migratory flyway for this species?

As noted earlier, the normal winter range of Pectoral Sandpiper lies predominantly in southern South America. Observer coverage at similar latitudes in Africa is extremely low, which is a perennial problem when trying to detect small, sparsely distributed wintering populations (Gilroy & Lees 2003). Nonetheless, a surprising number of records do exist in this region. For example, Sinclair *et al.* (1993) described Pectoral Sandpiper as a 'rare but regular (austral) summer visitor' to southern Africa. Typically, these individuals arrive in early December, some two months later than the mean arrival period to this region of vagrant Baird's Sandpipers *C. bairdii*, for which storm-drift during normal migration is a more likely cause of vagrancy (Borrow & Demey 2001). Elsewhere, there are also records of Pectoral Sandpipers from several sub-Saharan West African nations, including Mauritania, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Ivory Coast, Ghana, Gabon and Príncipe, between October and March (Borrow & Demey 2001). Furthermore, vagrants have also occurred in East Africa, with at least two records from Kenya and one from Burundi (Stevenson & Fanshawe 2002). It seems that there is great potential for a small but viable wintering population of Pectoral Sandpipers to exist in these areas.

Taking this hypothesis one step further, it is not implausible that a discrete population could use Europe as a regular migratory flyway to wintering grounds somewhere in Africa. Perhaps the most likely origin for such a 'pseudo-vagrant population' of Pectoral Sandpipers would be Siberia (fig. 4). For those individuals breeding at the western extreme of the Siberian breeding range, it might be expected that a shorter, and largely overland, route to suitable Old World wintering areas would enhance the chance of surviving an otherwise arduous migration to southern South America. It would seem that those capable of finding suitable wintering areas in the Old World, surviving the winter, and successfully returning to breed would be at an advantage over those travelling to South America (Mead 1983; Sutherland 1998). Presumably, the small wintering population in Australasia represents a proportion of Siberian breeders using an alternative migratory route through Asia. In terms of overall distance and the availability of potential staging areas, a route to Africa via western Europe might perhaps be similarly viable.

In Britain & Ireland, Pectoral Sandpipers are considerably scarcer in spring than in autumn. This is to be expected considering: a) the urgency of spring passage; b) the effect of winter mortality; and c) the potential differences in observer behaviour (with less attention paid to island archipelagos and wader hotspots). There is, however, evidence of a spring bias to records in central and eastern Europe,

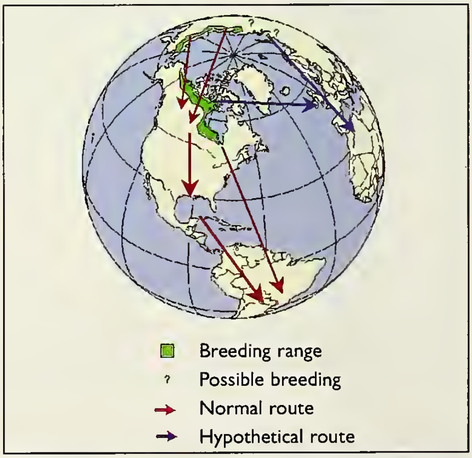

Fig. 4. Global projection map showing the breeding range and normal migratory route of Pectoral Sandpipers *Calidris melanotos*. The hypothetical routes (blue) show potential migration strategies which could be used by small populations wintering in southern or western Africa.

Bill Baston

373. Juvenile Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*, Bawdsey, Suffolk, September 2003.

which suggests that northbound spring migrants might use a different, more easterly, route than in autumn (in North America, the main movement of Pectoral Sandpipers in spring follows a more westerly route than in autumn; Farmer & Wiens 1999). In both The Netherlands and Denmark, for example, spring and autumn records of Pectoral Sandpiper occur with approximately similar frequency (van den Berg & Bosman 1999), while in Finland Pectoral Sandpiper is predominantly a spring vagrant (Lewington *et al.* 1991). Nonetheless, there is at least some degree of spring passage through Britain & Ireland and, following the bumper autumn in 2003, this involved at least 41 birds between 11th April and 14th June 2004. Thus, until a clearer picture emerges, it is assumed that return passage also occurs on a broad front through western Europe.

The annual influx of Pectoral Sandpipers into Europe may, therefore, consist of transatlantic vagrants caught up in severe weather systems, and also birds from both North America and Siberia which have developed an alternative migratory strategy, and now overwinter in Africa. Shorebird migration routes are dynamic, and different populations are apt to establish new migration routes and wintering grounds if traditional routes become suboptimal. While the bulk of the population of Pectoral Sandpipers (including many of the Siberian breeders) move south along a narrow overland route through the USA to South America, there may exist perhaps as many as six secondary routes to suitable wintering areas. These are, in approximate order of likelihood:

1. American and Siberian birds moving east towards staging areas in northeast USA and the Atlantic shoreline of Canada, and then south on a transoceanic route across the Caribbean into South America;
2. American (and more likely Siberian) birds moving south along the Pacific seaboard of the USA;
3. Siberian (and American?) birds moving across the Pacific to winter on island groups in the central Pacific, predominantly Polynesia and Hawaii;
4. Siberian birds moving south along the Asian Pacific seaboard to winter in southeast Australia and New Zealand;
5. Siberian birds moving west and south, via Europe, to winter in Africa;
6. American birds migrating across the Atlantic, via western Europe, to winter in Africa.

The identification of such routes and wintering grounds is undoubtedly a worthwhile exercise. Although the magnitude of passage along many of these routes may be small, they may still be of biological importance. Habitat change on the wintering grounds has been a factor implicated in the population decline of various waders, including Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis* and Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris* (BirdLife International 2000). Species which maintain small pseudo-vagrant populations in highly disparate wintering areas are likely to be less vulnerable to catastrophic changes in their main winter range. By exploiting a wide range of potential wintering grounds, Pectoral Sandpipers may have avoided the conservation equivalent of putting all their eggs in a single basket.

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Report on scarce migrant birds in Britain in 2002

Part 1: European Bee-eater to Little Bunting

Peter A. Fraser and Michael J. Rogers

ABSTRACT This report documents the changing fortunes of those scarce migrant species reaching Britain in 2002. The year 2002 was the best year on record for Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria* and Rose-coloured Starling *Sturnus roseus*, the latter having recently been dropped as a species considered by BBRC and included in this report for the first time, while European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*, Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* and Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* occurred in impressive numbers, making 2002 the second-best year on record for all three. While the fortunes of these species are buoyant, for others, most notably Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* and Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola*, the numbers reaching Britain remain worryingly low, and draw attention to long-term declines in their respective European breeding populations. For many other birds currently considered to be scarce migrants, the numbers reaching Britain fluctuate annually, being influenced by a range of factors including prevailing weather conditions and breeding success. It is by the long-term monitoring of these species, where the identification is assessed at a local or county level and established by records committees, that possible changes in status and populations can best be determined.

In this, the eighth annual report on scarce migrant birds in Britain, the decision has been taken to split the report into two sections, with this section covering European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* to Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*. The remaining non-passerines will be dealt with in early 2005. By splitting the report into two parts, it has been possible to include expanded comments on some species, along with extra charts and maps. Additional data for each species may be found in the 'Scarce Migrants' section of the BBRC website (www.bbrc.org.uk).

In recent years, many scarce migrants have been reported via the various pager services and birdline telephone providers or other media. In this report, however, only those records which have been assessed and accepted by the relevant local, regional or national records panels have been included. By covering records for birds seen in 2002, this report is inevitably well out of date when published, with some records taking almost three years from the date of occurrence to their appearance here. We make no apology for this, as it is the nature of this report that it requires the acceptance and publication of records before the compilation and analysis of statistics can begin; it is not intended to be a topical digest. Every year, the time taken to assemble the data varies considerably among counties and, consequently, despite the willing and enthusiastic co-operation of nearly all Britain's County Recorders and their assistants, this report must be published well after the year under review. Even working to this extended timescale, some records are inevitably excluded. For years prior to 2002, such excluded records are included within the revised statistics presented here for those counties and sub-counties which have recently made this data available. Current gaps in the source material for the scarce migrants database can be seen on the website (see above), and we urge recorders to submit their data for 2002 and previous years if they have not already done so. Statistics will be updated to include any omitted data for 2002 in future reports but for obvious reasons it is always our desire to make each report as complete as possible at the time of publication. In addition, records previously treated as being 'at sea' but within the 200-mile 'British Economic Zone' have been included, although in this first section of the report, this involves just one record, a Little Bunting on a North Sea oil-production platform.

Table 1. These data show the relative abundance of each species in 2002, by ranking the number of individuals recorded during 2002 in the context of previous annual totals. For example, 2002 was the second-best year on record for European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*. Note that the number of years of comparable data varies according to species. This table highlights in more detail which species were recorded in relatively high or low numbers in 2002. When compared with previous reports in this series (e.g. Fraser & Rogers 2002, 2003), it is apparent that some species are appearing more regularly towards the bottom of the table. In particular, several southern or southeastern species, such as Hoopoe *Upupa epops*, Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* and Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*, are in the midst of a run of poor years. Others, including European Bee-eater and Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*, have moved well up the table since 2001 owing to the large number of birds reported in 2002.

Species	No. in 2002	Year Rank	Years of data
Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*	286	1	35
Rose-coloured Starling *Sturnus roseus*	182	1	45
European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*	102	2	45
Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*	380	2	17
Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*	32	2	45
Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*	133	3	35
Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*	81	5	35
Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*	261	6	17
Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*	132	6	17
Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*	46	9	17
Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*	128	9	35
Pallas's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus*	38	11	45
Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*	95	12	35
Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*	113	13	35
Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*	106	13	45
Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*	15	14	45
European Serin *Serinus serinus*	41	15	45
Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*	20	16	45
Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*	32	17	35
Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*	259	17	35
Richard's Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae*	78	18	45
Hoopoe *Upupa epops*	90	27	35
Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola*	12	34	45
Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*	9	37	45

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*

Number of individuals in 2002	Number of individuals in 1958-2002	Year rank	Highest annual maxima 1958-2002			Annual means 1958-2002				
			1997	2002	1991	1958-69	1970-79	1980-89	1990-99	2000-02
102	844	2	132	102	71	4	6	20	38	50

The year 2002 was an excellent one for European Bee-eaters in Britain, the 102 recorded comprising the second-best annual total on record. The first of the year was seen at Dungeness, Kent, on 9th May and records then continued throughout the summer until 11th September, when four were seen at Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire. There was a particularly large influx in the first week of July, when no fewer than 21 were reported, including two parties of five birds (at Ewerby, Lincolnshire, on 3rd July, and at Minsmere, Suffolk, on 9th July) and one of six (in the Norfolk Broads, on 14th July), the largest flock of the year. A group of three which toured Highland during the summer are counted only once in the totals, but groups of three in Northeast Scotland and Lothian in August seem more likely to have been different birds and have been regarded as such. The geographical distribution of the year's records is shown in fig. 1.

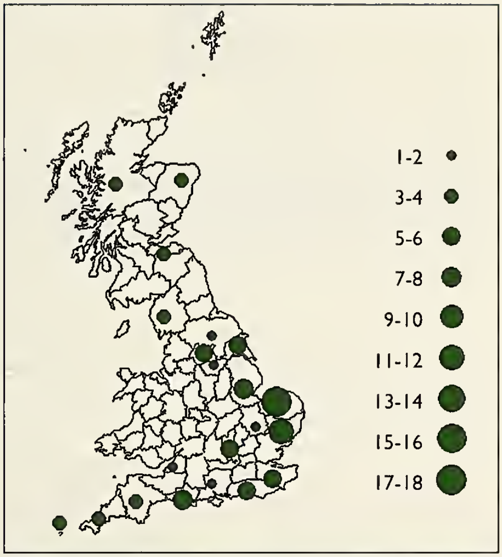

Fig. 1. Distribution of presumed newly arrived European Bee-eaters *Merops apiaster* in Britain in 2002.

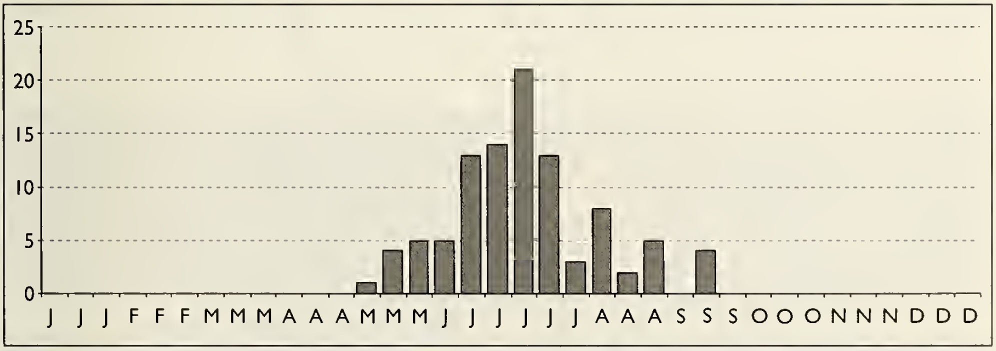

Fig. 2. Numbers of European Bee-eaters *Merops apiaster* in Britain in 2002, showing records of presumed newly arrived birds grouped by ten-day periods.

Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

Number of individuals in 2002	Number of individuals in 1968-2002	Year rank	Highest annual maxima 1968-2002			Annual means 1968-2002			
			1968	1980	1977	1968-79	1980-89	1990-99	2000-02
90	4,142	27	218	188	178	118	133	118	69

For the fourth successive year, fewer than 100 Hoopoes were reported in Britain and this continues the long-term downward trend (particularly evident when the rising numbers of active observers is taken into account), which in turn reflects ongoing declines in the species' European breeding range (*BWP*;

Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). The spring tally of 71 began with one at Bosullow, Cornwall, on 11th February, with the last being at Seacroft, Lincolnshire, on 18th June. April was the best month, with 30 records, followed by May with 20, March with 17 and June with just three sightings. Most were concentrated in southern Britain but three were seen as far north as Scotland, with birds at Stewarton, Ayrshire, on 4th April; Cammoch, Perth & Kinross, on 9th May; and Braeside, Orkney, on 12th June. The first of these seems most likely to have been an overshooting bird from the south, while the Orkney individual was presumably of more northern origin. Although occasional midsummer occurrences are not unusual (and Hoopoes have bred in Britain on about 30 occasions), one summering in Buckinghamshire was assumed to have escaped from captivity. Elsewhere, July produced two in Wales and one in Devon, with another in Devon on 1st August. There were just 15 autumn Hoopoes, widely scattered among 14 different recording areas, including birds in the landlocked counties of Montgomeryshire, Shropshire, Warwickshire and Wiltshire, and two in Highland, at Loch Brora on 1st September and Glen Feshie on 13th October.

Some of those found later in the autumn (for example, the two latest records in 2002: singles at Stableford, Shropshire, and in eastern Glamorgan, on 1st and 4th November respectively), and, more generally, those Hoopoes which occasionally appear in Britain in the winter, perhaps originate from well to the east and arrive here as reverse migrants. Whether any of these come from far enough east to be of the Siberian race *saturata*, which has reportedly occurred in Sweden (*BWP Concise*), is uncertain. Indeed, Hoopoe has a particularly protracted autumn migration and even some extremely late migrants could perhaps still originate from relatively close to Britain.

Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*

Number of individuals in 2002	Number of individuals in 1986-2002	Year rank	Highest annual maxima 1986-2002			Annual means 1986-2002		
			1998	2002	1987	1986-89	1990-99	2000-02
380	4,696	2	407	380	354	311	257	293

In 2002, Wrynecks enjoyed their second-best year since 1986, when national record collation for this species began. A spring total of 36 birds was unremarkable, but did include two early individuals, at Lostwithiel, Cornwall, on 29th March, and Worth, Kent, on 2nd April. There were then no further reports until 13th April, with peak passage occurring between 7th and 20th May, and the last spring migrant on Scilly, on 6th-14th June. After three midsummer records, between 23rd June and 20th July, autumn passage began with an exhausted bird on The Naze, Essex, on 31st July. Overall, autumn passage was exceptional, involving 341 birds, the second-highest post-breeding total so far recorded (after 370 in 1998). A major influx began on 19th August and thereafter numbers built up to a peak in mid September (fig. 4). With the exception of 8th October, new birds appeared daily right through until 17th, when numbers quickly began to diminish, with one at St Just, Cornwall, on 31st October, being the last of the year.

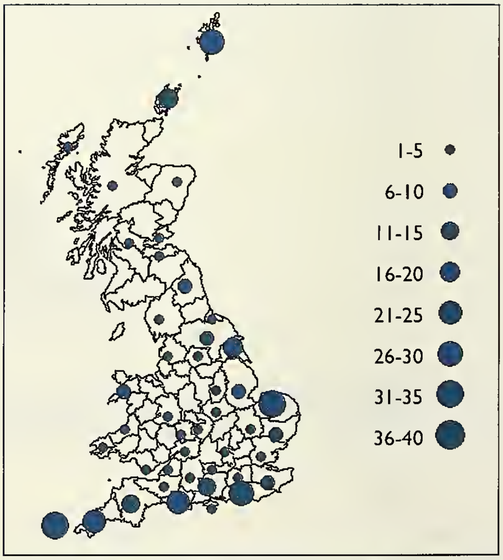

Fig. 3. Distribution of Wrynecks *Jynx torquilla* in Britain in autumn 2002. Note the typical bias towards the south and east coasts of England, and the Northern Isles.

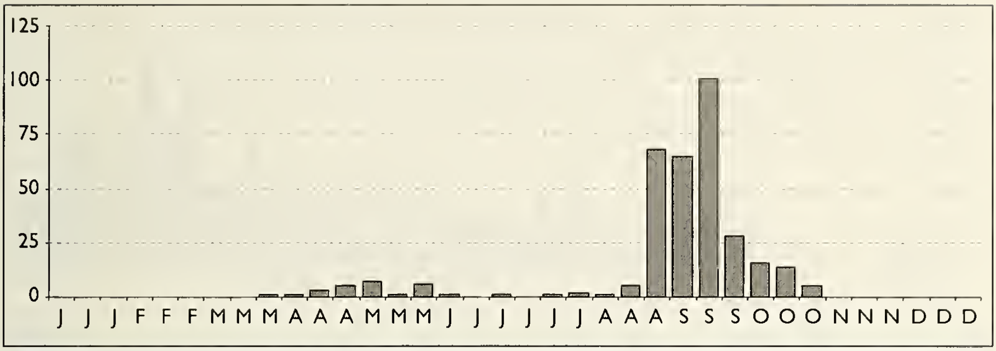

Fig. 4. Numbers of Wrynecks *Jynx torquilla* in Britain in 2002. Autumn 2002 was exceptionally good for Wrynecks in Britain, and the coincidence of arrival times with those of Barred Warblers *Sylvia nisoria* (see fig. 6), together with the similarly large numbers of that species recorded in 2002, are noteworthy. It is tempting to suggest that the factors governing occurrence patterns in the two species may be closely connected.

Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*

Number of individuals in 2002	Number of individuals in 1958-2002	Year rank	Highest annual maxima 1958-2002			Annual means 1958-2002				
			1996	1994	1999	1958-69	1970-79	1980-89	1990-99	2000-02
15	623	14	45	39	31	5	11	13	27	19

The 15 Short-toed Larks seen in Britain in 2002 constitute the lowest annual total since 1990, when 14 were recorded, and are two fewer than in 2001. The bumper years of the mid 1990s appear to be well and truly past (see fig. 5). In spring, eight occurred between 5th and 30th May, with two together at Prawle, Devon, on 15th; two on Scilly on 30th (on Bryher and St Martin's); and singles at Towyn Point, Ceredigion, at Land's End, Cornwall, at Filey, North Yorkshire, and on Fair Isle, Shetland. The seven autumn birds included three in north Norfolk between 10th and 13th September; two on Scilly, on 12th and 24th September; along with singles at Vidlin, Shetland, on 2nd October, and Aldborough, East Yorkshire, on 1st-2nd November.

Gary Bellingham

374. Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*, Towyn Point, Ceredigion, May 2002.

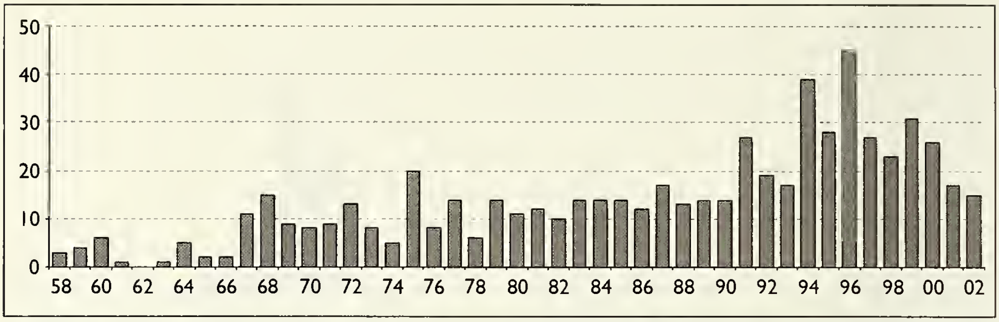

Fig. 5. Annual totals of Short-toed Larks *Calandrella brachydactyla* in Britain, 1958-2002.

It has long been suspected that birds occurring in Britain fall into two broad categories: sandy-coloured individuals, presumed to be races from southern and western parts of the range (such as nominate *brachydactyla*); and greyer-toned individuals of more eastern origin (suspected of being, for example, Central Asian *longipennis*, or associated races) (*BWP*; Svensson 1992). The former category seems to account for many spring records, while individuals of the latter group seem to occur mostly in autumn, especially late autumn. Racial identification of Short-toed Larks is fraught with difficulties, however, not least because of the very large number of subtle and overlapping forms currently recognised and the high degree of individual *and* seasonal variation within races. If members of more than one taxon are indeed occurring here, as seems likely, then the generally rather low annual totals for this species as a whole may mean that one or more races are effectively national rarities (i.e. averaging less than ten per year) rather than scarce migrants. Owing to the complexities of subspecific identification, any progress in unravelling such issues is likely to occur only slowly and may require some rationalisation of the current subspecies divisions as a first step.

Richard's Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae*

Number of individuals in 2002	Number of individuals in 1958-2002	Year rank	Highest annual maxima 1958-2002			Annual means 1958-2002				
			1994	2001	1995	1958-69	1970-79	1980-89	1990-99	2000-02
78	3,211	18	352	175	159	34	51	65	130	114

Only 78 new Richard's Pipits were recorded in Britain in 2002, which is well below average for recent years. There were, however, two midwinter records during the year, with one (from 2001) at Cambridge, Gloucestershire, during 1st-3rd January, and the other at Holmbush, Cornwall, on 14th January. These were followed by four widely spread spring records: at Weybourne, Norfolk, on 16th March; at Winterton, Norfolk, on 3rd April; on St Martin's on 6th May; and on Fair Isle on 11th May. Autumn passage began on 9th September, with an early migrant at Grimston, East Yorkshire, followed by a further 11 later that month, 45 in October and 15 in November. The last of the year was at Land's End on 5th December. As usual, most records came from coastal counties, and inland records are always notable. In 2002, these included individuals at Hyde, Greater Manchester, on 17th October, and Holmewood and Williamthorpe, Derbyshire, on 11th-12th October. These inland records, together with three along the Bristol Channel coast in Avon and Somerset, suggest that some birds may follow major river systems, for example, the Trent, Ouse and Severn valleys, as they migrate through Britain.

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*

Number of individuals in 2002	Number of individuals in 1958-2002	Year rank	Highest annual maxima 1958-2002			Annual means 1958-2002				
			1992	1983	1993/77	1958-69	1970-79	1980-89	1990-99	2000-02
9	1,106	37	57	56	45	13	27	36	29	12

Another year goes by and Tawny Pipit fails yet again to appear in good numbers. Over the five-year period 1998-2002, an average of only 11 Tawny Pipits has occurred annually in Britain, barely sufficient to keep it out of the clutches of BBRC! In recent years, several species currently assessed by BBRC have occurred in Britain with greater frequency than Tawny Pipit, and unless there is a dramatic change in the fortunes of this elegant pipit, it looks set to return to its former national-rarity status. All the comments made for this species in the 2001 report (*Brit Birds* 96: 640-641) still apply. The first of the year, at Awre, Gloucestershire, on 24th April, was followed by a further five spring records. Three of these were in Scotland: at Carnan, Western Isles, on 10th May; at Foveran, Northeast Scotland, on 13th-16th May, and at Skaw, Unst, Shetland, on 25th-30th May; the other two were on St Martin's on 5th May, and at Cley, Norfolk, on 1st June. Just three were seen in autumn, typically all on the English south coast and all in September. The first appeared at Dungeness on 7th September and was quickly followed by two in Sussex: at Pagham Harbour on 13th September and at Beachy Head on 14th-15th September.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*

Number of individuals in 2002	Number of individuals in 1968-2002	Year rank	Highest annual maxima 1968-2002			Annual means 1968-2002			
			1985	1981	1993	1968-79	1980-89	1990-99	2000-02
113	4,475	13	622	333	267	98	186	116	92

A total of 113 Bluethroats was recorded throughout Britain in 2002, which is in line with the average in the 1990s but represents an improvement on the last few years. Where the racial provenance was established, the majority were of the more familiar red-spotted form *svecica*, but there were four confirmed spring records of the white-spotted race *cyanecula*. Three of these were in March: at Orfordness, Suffolk, on 16th; at Blacktoft Sands, East Yorkshire, on 21st; and at Hook-with-Warsash, Hampshire, on 31st (another individual in March, at Palmarsh, Kent, on 17th, was not identified to race but is likely to have been *cyanecula*). The only other spring record of *cyanecula* was an individual at Holland Haven, Essex, on 27th April, but in the autumn an adult was reported at North Petherton, Somerset, on 8th October. Aside from the aforementioned records, there were another 83 in spring. The first confirmed *svecica* was on Fair Isle on 19th April, with another in south Mainland Shetland on 30th April, but the main passage fell between 7th May and 10th June, with a notably late inland record

Steve Young/Birdwatch

375. First-winter Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*, St Mary's, Scilly, October 2002.

in Argyll & Bute on 21st June. Scotland received the lion's share of the spring passage, including 54 on Shetland and nine on North Ronaldsay, Orkney. In contrast, there were just 15 in England, with six in Northumberland being the highest English county score. A paltry two were found on the south coast: a male at Combe Haven, East Sussex, on 21st May, and a female on Portland, Dorset, on 4th June.

Return passage kicked off with one at Titchfield Haven, Hampshire, on 1st September, the first of 13 Bluethroats reported that month, followed by 11 in October and just one November record. The pattern of occurrence of the autumn birds showed a distinctly southern bias, with nine on Scilly, a further four scattered along the English south coast and just four in Shetland (and none in Orkney). Elsewhere in autumn, one was seen at Langass, Western Isles, on 10th October, and a first-winter female was picked up dead at Pontfagog, Denbighshire, on 16th September. The last record of the year was on Portland on 7th November.

Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola*

Number of individuals in 2002	Number of individuals in 1958-2002	Year rank	Highest annual maxima 1958-2002			Annual means 1958-2002				
			1976	1991	1972	1958-69	1970-79	1980-89	1990-99	2000-02
12	1,200	34	102	62	61	10	40	23	42	12

With just 12 individuals reported during the autumn and, as usual, none in spring (when a more easterly migration route is apparently taken), Aquatic Warbler remains one of the scarcest of the regular migrants that reach Britain, vying with Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* to be reinstated as a species considered by BBRC. Without the handful of birds trapped for ringing, Aquatic Warbler would surely have remained a BBRC species ever since the Committee's foundation in 1958. Following the now well-established pattern, most birds were found in mistnets set in reedbeds bordering the English south coast. The first of the year appeared at Pett Levels, East Sussex, on 3rd August and was followed by a further nine during the month, these being at Spurn, East Yorkshire, on 4th; Pett Levels again on 8th and 15th; Titchfield Haven on 10th and 20th; Uskmouth, Gwent, on 14th and 19th; Portland on 15th; and Keysworth, Dorset, on 31st. The only others reported were from Soar, Devon, on 15th September, and Tresco, Scilly, on 9th October.

A key factor in determining how many Aquatic Warblers reach our shores appears to be the presence of settled weather and a southeasterly airflow during the peak passage month of August. Evidence from ringing on the near continent suggests that, in autumn, the main migration route of this seriously declining species lies just on the other side of the English Channel, as birds orientate southwest towards poorly known wintering areas in West Africa. Although most Aquatic Warblers are trapped in reedbeds, this may not actually be the preferred feeding habitat of the species during migration and those found without the aid of nets tend to inhabit stands of rushes *Juncus* instead. The presence of birds in reedbeds early in the morning may simply be the result of their attraction to this habitat during nocturnal migration, as soon after dawn they seem to move elsewhere and are seldom trapped in reedbeds later in the day (Wernham *et al.* 2002).

Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*

Number of individuals in 2002	Number of individuals in 1986-2002	Year rank	Highest annual maxima 1986-2002			Annual means 1986-2002		
			1992	1996	1997	1986-89	1990-99	2000-02
46	749	9	103	58	57	30	51	42

It was a fairly typical year for migrant Marsh Warblers in Britain in 2002. The bulk of the spring passage occurred in Shetland, which accounted for 28 of the 43 birds, with 11 on Fair Isle alone between 29th May and 15th June. Other records comprised birds in Cleveland (3), Fife, Kent (3), Lothian, Norfolk, Northumberland, North Yorkshire, Orkney (2), Suffolk and Wiltshire. Autumn passage was poor, with just three birds: at Flamborough Head, East Yorkshire, on 16th August; at Norwick, Unst, Shetland, on 26th August; and at Soldier's Point, Anglesey, on 31st October.

The peak departure dates of Marsh Warblers from western Europe are in August and, to a lesser extent, September, so that claims in October or even early November inevitably come under close scrutiny. Nonetheless, the possibility that late records represent reverse migrants from the eastern extremities of the range, which overlaps with that of various vagrants which certainly do occur here at this time, should be borne in mind.

Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*

Number of individuals in 2002	Number of individuals in 1968-2002	Year rank	Highest annual maxima 1968-2002			Annual means 1968-2002			
			1997	1992	1995/77	1968-79	1980-89	1990-99	2000-02
128	3,578	9	286	277	173	79	104	138	69

Following four consecutive years in which the annual total of Icterine Warblers fell below 100 individuals, the 128 in 2002 was a distinct improvement. Spring passage was particularly good, 41 individuals being the third-highest total at this season since collation of records began, in 1968. Early reports came from Brora, Highland, on 6th May; Sea Palling, Norfolk, on 7th May; and Sanday, Orkney, on 14th May. The main influx commenced on 22nd May, with 17 reported to the end of the month and a further 17 in the first eight days of June. Late records came from the Northern Isles on 25th and 30th June, with a presumed extremely late 'spring' bird on Fair Isle on 5th July. The autumn passage brought 87 birds to Britain, just above the 1968-2002 seasonal mean of 80.5. Of these, three arrived on the east coast on 3rd August, and were followed by a steady trickle of birds until 23rd September, with a marked influx during 8th-10th September, when 25 were discovered. None were found in October, but the last migrant of the year appeared at Rimac, Lincolnshire, on the notably late date of 2nd November.

John Harriman

376. Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*, Donna Nook, Lincolnshire, November 2002.

Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*

Number of individuals in 2002	Number of individuals in 1968-2002	Year rank	Highest annual maxima 1968-2002			Annual means 1968-2002			
			1981	1996	1983	1968-79	1980-89	1990-99	2000-02
32	1,120	17	60	59	54	29	39	30	27

The total of 32 Melodious Warblers recorded in Britain in 2002 is, by coincidence, exactly the same as the mean annual total for this species since national record collation began, in 1968. It is also noteworthy that these mean totals have remained pretty consistent since 1968, despite increasing numbers of observers, suggesting a 'real terms' decrease in occurrence. There were three spring records in 2002: on Portland on 12th May; at Combe Haven, East Sussex, on 22nd May; and on Skokholm, Pembrokeshire, on 30th May. The first of the autumn, on 31st July, was also on Portland, a long-time hot-spot for this species. A further 12 arrived between 14th and 20th August, but only four were found between 21st August and 9th September. Another small influx, between 11th and 21st September, brought a further eight, after which there were just three in October, including the last of the year, on St Mary's, Scilly, on 28th. Away from southwest England and west Wales, autumn records came from the Isle of Man, Kent and Sussex (2). There were also two on Shetland in autumn 2002, providing further confirmation that not all 'green and yellow' *Hippolais* warblers in the north and east will turn out to be Icterine.

Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*

Number of individuals in 2002	Number of individuals in 1968-2002	Year rank	Highest annual maxima 1968-2002			Annual means 1968-2002			
			2002	1994	2001	1968-79	1980-89	1990-99	2000-02
286	5,004	1	286	238	230	144	108	158	206

Although late records received since publication of the report for 2001 have increased the total for that year to 230, making it the third-best on record, 2002 was, by a considerable margin, the best year ever for Barred Warblers in Britain. Predictably enough, all reports came during the autumn, with the first at Skaw, Unst, Shetland, on 5th August and, again predictably, Shetland was responsible for a significant chunk of the national total (121, or 42%). Norfolk (30), Orkney (24), East Yorkshire (20), Northumberland (14), the Western Isles (12) and Scilly (11) also registered double-figure totals, while further reports were received from 16 counties or recording areas, all of these being along the North Sea coast or (to a lesser extent) the south coast of England, with the exception of three birds on Bardsey, Caernarfonshire, in September and one on the Calf of Man, Isle of Man, also in September. The 2002 influx differed slightly from the established occurrence pattern, with the peak arrival occurring in the first ten days of September rather than the last ten days of August, and this was followed by a small secondary influx in mid October (fig. 6).

Several factors need to be taken into account when considering why Barred Warblers occur here at

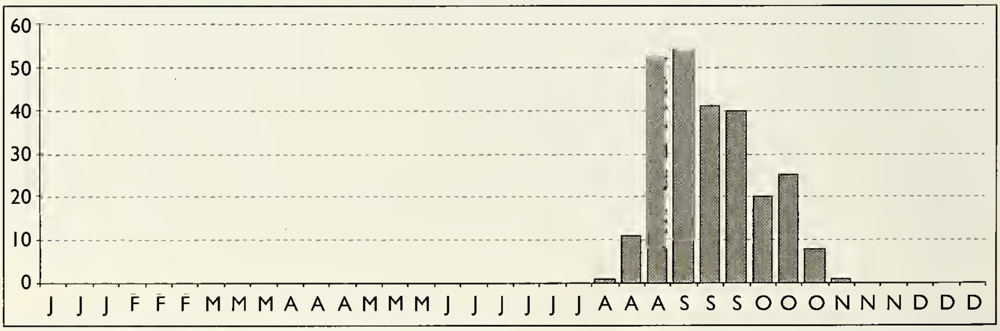

Fig. 6. Numbers of Barred Warblers *Sylvia nisoria* in Britain in 2002, showing the numbers of newly arrived birds in ten-day periods, where exact dates are known.

all and why numbers from year to year may vary quite widely. It is possible that this species has a particularly well-developed pattern of juvenile dispersal with, prior to the onset of migration proper, birds radiating out in all directions from natal areas, but particularly in whatever direction the prevailing winds happen to drift them. A period of anticyclonic weather with easterly winds across northern Europe during early autumn is likely to bring such drift migrants to Britain, and the presence or absence of such conditions will have some bearing on the numbers occurring each year, at least early in the autumn. Such dispersal patterns probably influence the occurrence of several other species, such as Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*, which was also seen in good numbers in Britain in autumn 2002 and peaked at around the same time as Barred Warbler. Drift migration cannot, however, account entirely for occurrences of Barred Warblers.

An element of reverse migration must also play an important role and cause birds to undertake more determined movements away from the expected direction of travel of a species that should be migrating towards Kenya. The fact that Barred Warblers sometimes occur during periods of persistent westerly winds offers support to this theory, as does the occurrence of birds late in the autumn, long after the abandonment of breeding areas in August and early September. These late-autumn arrivals, emphasised in 2002 by the small October peak, may originate from well to the east of the species' range and have been travelling determinedly westwards for many weeks before arriving here. It is possible that some may originate from far enough east to be of the subtle form *merzbacheri* from Central Asia, but this is impossible to confirm without a ringing recovery.

Actual variations in annual numbers are, above all, probably closely linked to the size and productivity of the breeding population each year. What ultimately happens to those Barred Warblers which do arrive in Britain is a mystery; perhaps some fatten up and then reorientate southeastwards to East African wintering areas, though there is little evidence from ringing to confirm or deny this (Wernham *et al.* 2002). The almost complete absence of records of adults in autumn suggests, though, that if some do manage to reorientate, or perhaps survive their first winter in alternative wintering areas, their initial migration pattern is not followed later in life. Indeed, given the relative proximity of its breeding range, it is quite remarkable that no more than a tiny number of adult Barred Warblers have ever been recorded in Britain, at any season.

Pallas's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus*

Number of individuals in 2002	Number of individuals in 1958-2002	Year rank	Highest annual maxima 1958-2002			Annual means 1958-2002				
			1997	1994	1996	1958-69	1970-79	1980-89	1990-99	2000-02
38	1,474	11	171	161	142	3	9	39	83	44

Although more than the meagre total of 17 recorded in 2001, 38 Pallas's Warblers in a year in Britain is, by recent standards, still a rather poor showing. As usual, all reports were in autumn (there are still only a tiny handful of spring records), with the first at Holkham, Norfolk, on 9th October, followed by a concentrated arrival of 17 during 11th-14th October. Most records came from the English east and south coasts, although six were found in Scotland and one in Caernarfonshire, at the Great Orme, on 19th-21st October. Birds continued to appear throughout late October and November with perhaps the most notable record of the year at Bolham, Nottinghamshire, on 25th November (a county 'first'). One on St Mary's, from 26th November to 1st December, was the last of the year.

Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*

Number of individuals in 2002	Number of individuals in 1968-2002	Year rank	Highest annual maxima 1968-2002			Annual means 1968-2002			
			1988	1985	1986	1968-79	1980-89	1990-99	2000-02
259	8,206	17	739	542	498	72	321	327	291

The 259 Yellow-browed Warblers recorded in Britain in 2002 comprised the third-lowest annual total since 1984, the point at which the number of annual occurrences in Britain increased sharply (see *Brit.*

George Reszeter

377. Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*, St Mary's, Scilly, October 2002.

Birds 96: 645). There was, however, a single spring record this year, at Ventnor Downs, Isle of Wight, on 25th April. Also unusual was the fact that the first autumn arrivals were in England, in mid September, with singles at Carnon Bridge, Cornwall, on 10th; Donna Nook, Lincolnshire, on 11th; and Spurn on 14th. Scotland, in particular the Northern Isles, is a more expected first landfall and such early dates would be noteworthy even there; in 2002, one in Orkney on 22nd September was the first for the Northern Isles. After 16th September, new arrivals were reported almost every day until 3rd November, the peak arrival date being 9th October, when 24 individuals were discovered. Inland records, always a good find, included birds at Shelfield Common, Hampshire, on 24th October; Slimbridge, Gloucestershire, on 31st October; and Sutton Weaver, Cheshire, on 9th November.

Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*

Number of individuals in 2002	Number of individuals in 1968-2002	Year rank	Highest annual maxima 1968-2002			Annual means 1968-2002			
			1984	1976	2002	1968-79	1980-89	1990-99	2000-02
133	3,242	3	196	174	133	75	115	87	107

With 133 birds recorded, 2002 was an excellent year for Red-breasted Flycatcher in Britain, and the third-best for the species since 1968. Spring records are always notable, though the total of five in spring 2002 was in line with the annual spring mean since 1968 (5.5). Of these, three were found in Orkney, on 30th May, 7th and 10th June, with the others at Griminish, Western Isles, on 24th May, and on Skokholm on 27th-29th May. Such late dates are entirely consistent with birds having overshot their central and eastern European breeding areas after arriving back from Indian winter quarters. The first of the autumn was at North Roe, Shetland, on 24th August, and was followed by a further 12 widely scattered individuals before a major influx of 52 in mid September (fig. 7). New arrivals were then reported almost daily until 20th October, while late birds appeared at Fife Ness Muir, Fife, on 2nd November and on Portland on 17th-18th November. The majority were along the North Sea and English Channel coasts, with the largest numbers in East Yorkshire (24), Norfolk (23), Shetland (17) and Scilly (16). Away from east- and south-coast counties, two in the Western Isles and one in Pembrokeshire (this time on Skomer, on 17th September) were the only other records.

The possibility must exist that a few past records of this species were actually overlooked examples

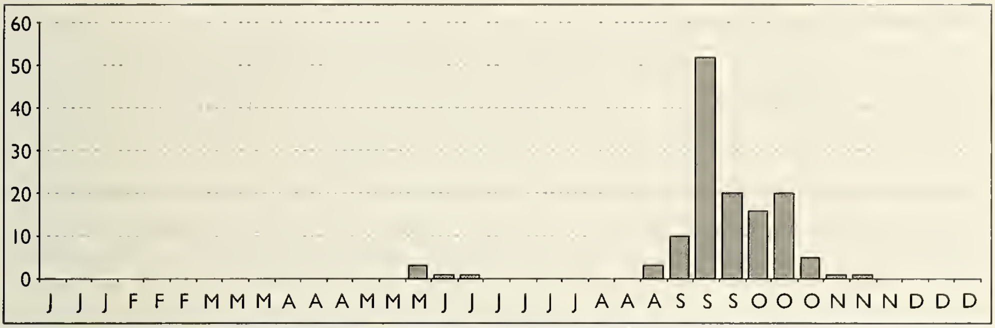

Fig. 7. Numbers of Red-breasted Flycatchers *Ficedula parva* in Britain in 2002.

of the recently split eastern taxon, Taiga Flycatcher *F. albicilla*; nonetheless, the dataset for Red-breasted Flycatcher is unlikely to be significantly flawed.

Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*

Number of individuals in 2002	Number of individuals in 1968-2002	Year rank	Highest annual maxima 1968-2002			Annual means 1968-2002			
			1994	1992	1997	1968-79	1980-89	1990-99	2000-02
95	3,022	12	235	184	157	48	84	132	94

Although the 95 migrant Golden Orioles reaching Britain in 2002 fell well below the annual average of 132 birds for the previous decade, the pattern of occurrence was in line with previous years, the large majority being spring overshoots on the south and east coasts. Small numbers penetrated inland and, of these, four reached the English north Midlands and beyond with records coming from Drakelow, Derbyshire, on 2nd May; Willington, Derbyshire, on 16th May; Attenborough, Nottinghamshire, on 2nd June; and Ayton Moor, North Yorkshire, on 4th June. There were just four records in autumn: at Porthgwarra, Cornwall, on 1st and 18th September; at Kilnsea, East Yorkshire, on 9th September; and a notable inland record at Stanford Reservoir, Leicestershire, on 18th September.

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*

Number of individuals in 2002	Number of individuals in 1986-2002	Year rank	Highest annual maxima 1986-2002			Annual means 1986-2002		
			1988	1998	1992	1986-89	1990-99	2000-02
261	3,926	6	423	374	364	255	230	200

With 120 in spring, 138 during the autumn and three July records from England, the total of 261 migrant Red-backed Shrikes in Britain in 2002 made it a rather average year for this species, with neither migration season proving exceptional. The first of the spring appeared on the Farne Islands, Northumberland, on the early date of 6th-7th May, but the main spring passage was in late May/early June, when a concentrated arrival of approximately 70 were found between 27th May and 8th June. Autumn passage began in the first week of August, with eight arriving along the North Sea coast, the first two appearing at Hartlepool, Cleveland, and on Fetlar, Shetland, both on 3rd August. Peak passage occurred between 15th August and 22nd September, when 107 (78% of the seasonal total) arrived, new individuals being found daily during this period. There were a further 14 in October and one notably late arrival, perhaps a reverse migrant from the east of the range, at Sudbourne, Suffolk, on 11th November. Inland, one at Slough sewage-works, Berkshire, on 21st-24th August, was a good local find. In terms of distribution, the expected east-coast counties, plus Scilly, dominated the statistics as follows: Shetland (88), Norfolk (23), Orkney (21), Scilly (21), East Yorkshire (20), Cleveland (14), Suffolk (10), Lincolnshire (8), Northumberland (7) and North Yorkshire (6).

Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*

Number of individuals in 2002	Number of individuals in 1986-2002	Year rank	Highest annual maxima 1986-2002		Annual means 1986-2002		
			1998	1991/90	1986-89	1990-99	2000-02
132	2,061	6	234	160	131	127	89

Records of this species are always difficult to analyse for these reports, the separation of wintering birds from genuine migrants being particularly tricky, but approximately 132 'new' Great Grey Shrikes were recorded in Britain in 2002. This represents a substantial improvement after poor showings in both 2000 and 2001, and is more in line with the numbers recorded during the 1980s and 1990s. Approximately 30 were reported during the first winter period and the spring, with 1-6 presumed new birds in each ten-day period until mid April.

In autumn, the first migrant was seen at Holme, Norfolk, on 6th October, with new arrivals reported daily thereafter until 24th October. Up to 65 individuals were found during this significant influx, most of which were short-staying migrants on the North Sea coast. In November and December, another 35 were reported at widely scattered, and mostly inland, locations, with 3-8 presumed new birds discovered during each ten-day period.

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*

Number of individuals in 2002	Number of individuals in 1958-2002	Year rank	Highest annual maxima 1958-2002			Annual means 1958-2002				
			1997	2002	1988	1958-69	1970-79	1980-89	1990-99	2000-02
32	695	2	36	32	26	12	13	16	21	19

In marked contrast to 2001, when just five Woodchat Shrikes were recorded, 2002 proved to be the second-best year for this species since 1958, with 32 birds discovered. The distribution of records in 2002 was rather unusual, with no fewer than 26 on Scilly or in south-coast counties between Cornwall and the Isle of Wight, two in Wales (in Glamorgan on 18th May and Carmarthenshire on 3rd June), while the other four were all in Scotland. The Scottish records included a long-staying individual at Tayport, Fife, from 28th May to 19th June; the second for Ayrshire, at Delamford on 10th-11th June; and singles at Kinloch, Highland, on 7th June and on Foula, Shetland, on 9th-11th July. Consequently, none was reported from well-watched East Anglia where Woodchat Shrike is usually to be expected. The top counties were Scilly (11), Cornwall (7), Dorset (4) and Devon (3).

Twenty-four appeared in spring, the first at St Levan, Cornwall, on 23rd March. Most of the spring migrants were found between 21st April and 10th June, with peaks in mid May (five on 16th-18th) and late May/early June (new records most days from 27th May to 7th June; fig. 8). After one in Dorset on 16th July, there were seven in autumn, the last of these at Kynance, Cornwall, on 22nd September. Note that the running totals include three accepted birds of the race *badius*, which has recently been added to the British List (*Brit. Birds* 97: 616-617) and is dealt with as a national rarity by BBRC.

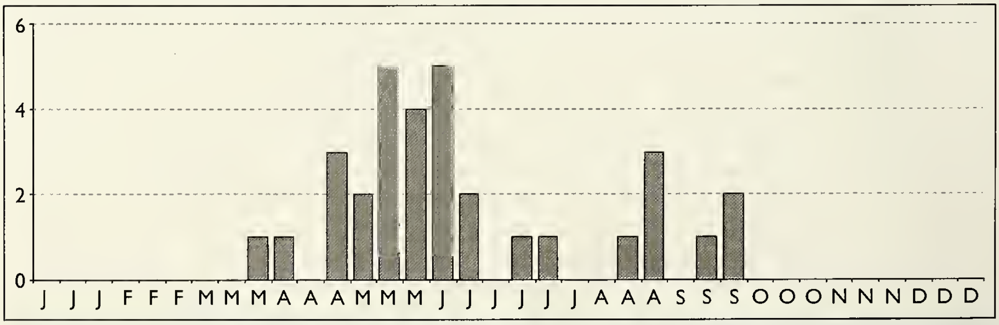

Fig. 8. Numbers of Woodchat Shrikes *Lanius senator* in Britain in 2002.

Rose-coloured Starling *Sturnus roseus*

Number of individuals in 2002	Number of individuals in 1958-2002	Year rank	Highest annual maxima 1958-2002			Annual means 1958-2002				
			2002	2001	2000	1958-69	1970-79	1980-89	1990-99	2000-02
182	647	1	182	66	43	3	6	8	18	97

Rose-coloured Starling was removed from the list of species considered by BBRC in 2001, and 'just in time' may be the members' comment as they heave a massive sigh of relief: the grand total of 182 recorded in 2002 represents over a quarter (28%) of the sum total since 1958! Although the three best years for this species in Britain had been as recent as 1999-2001, the events of 2002 were on quite another scale, even when compared with the occurrences of the preceding two years. The largest invasion of Rose-coloured Starlings into Europe in living memory occurred in summer 2002 and was undoubtedly one of the ornithological events of the year, with an estimated 14,000 extralimital pairs breeding in Romania, 2,000 pairs in Bulgaria and 10,000 non-breeding birds present in Hungary (Ottens 2003). In Europe, this species is characterised by its erratic and highly variable irruptions to the west of its normal range, and these are most likely to be driven by food availability (chiefly locusts, grasshoppers and other swarming Orthoptera) (*BWP Concise*).

A wintering bird in Norfolk is not included in the totals as it arrived in 2001, so the first new arrival of the year was one at Porthgwarra, Cornwall, on 31st May. This was rapidly followed by a widespread invasion (fig. 10) that was reflected right across northwest Europe, even as far as Iceland where 12 were reported. In Britain, new arrivals were found almost daily (and quite consistently) throughout June, with the exception of 23rd and 28th, bringing that month's tally to an extraordinary 96, while a further 33 were discovered in July. Although this influx was most marked in the southwest, with Cornwall (34), Scilly (17), Devon (13) and Pembrokeshire (11) all managing to reach double-figure totals, there were Rose-coloured Starlings

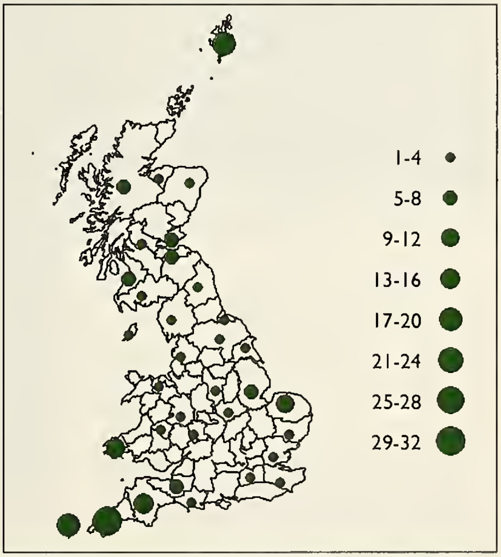

Fig. 9. Distribution of Rose-coloured Starlings *Sturnus roseus* in Britain in 2002.

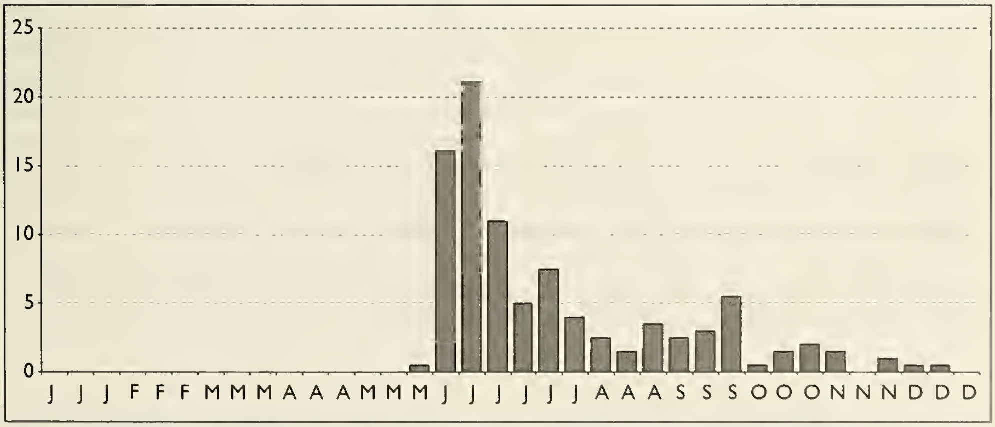

Fig. 10. Numbers of Rose-coloured Starlings *Sturnus roseus* in Britain in 2002. The extraordinary invasion in the summer of 2002 is described more fully in the text.

Robin Chittenden

378. Adult Rose-coloured Starling *Sturnus roseus*, Happisburgh, Norfolk, July 2002.

virtually throughout Britain (fig. 9), with Scotland doing particularly well (20 in Shetland alone and no fewer than eight in Highland). In contrast, the English east coast did not fare as well, with only Norfolk (10) and Lincolnshire (8) achieving noteworthy totals. This seemingly odd geographical spread for a species from the east was mirrored on the Continent, where relatively few were found in central Europe west of Hungary yet marked concentrations occurred along the northwestern seaboard. The likely explanation for this is simply that the birds' northwesterly migration bias was halted at the coast, where they consequently became concentrated and thus more easily detected (Ottens 2003).

European Serin *Serinus serinus*

Number of individuals in 2002	Number of individuals in 1958-2002	Year rank	Highest annual maxima 1958-2002			Annual means 1958-2002				
			1996	1994	1997	1958-69	1970-79	1980-89	1990-99	2000-02
41	1,501	15	99	82	75	8	19	37	68	52

There were 41 European Serins recorded in Britain in 2002, the lowest total since 1992 (with 40). After the first of the year, at Stalbridge, Dorset, on 16th March, spring passage extended until 29th June, with one at Seaton Common, Cleveland, but, typically, April proved to be the best month, with 11 birds reported. By comparison, the extremes of autumn passage were two at Nanjizal, Cornwall, on 13th September, and one on Portland on 29th November. As usual, few were seen away from the south coast and East Anglia, but in addition to the Cleveland record (above) there were records from Seahouses, Northumberland, on 25th April, Spurn on 2nd June, and the first for Warwickshire, at Moreton Morrell, on 3rd April. There were also two late-spring records in western Wales, at St David's Head, Pembrokeshire, on 22nd May, and Ynys-hir, Ceredigion, on 20th June.

Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*

Number of individuals in 2002	Number of individuals in 1958-2002	Year rank	Highest annual maxima 1958-2002			Annual means 1958-2002				
			1992	1995	2000	1958-69	1970-79	1980-89	1990-99	2000-02
106	3,136	13	244	180	173	10	37	76	149	130

Robin Chittenden

Common Rosefinches appear to be occurring somewhat less frequently now than in the last decade. During 2002, there were just 106 Common Rosefinches recorded in Britain, a figure well below the annual mean during the 1990s (although if the bumper year of 1992 is excluded, that mean comes down to 139). In 2002, 36 were recorded in spring, and 68 in autumn (plus two in July, in Cornwall and Shetland). Most of those in spring were seen in the Northern Isles and Yorkshire, although five penetrated west to Caernarfonshire, the Isle of Man, Pembrokeshire, Scilly and the Western Isles. In autumn, Shetland accounted for 60% of the total, with 41 individuals, followed by Orkney (6), Scilly (5) and the Western Isles (4); smaller numbers were reported in Cleveland, Dorset, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Northumberland, Suffolk and East and North Yorkshire.

379. Adult Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*, Weybourne, Norfolk, 2002.

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*

Number of individuals in 2002	Number of individuals in 1968-2002	Year rank	Highest annual maxima 1968-2002			Annual means 1968-2002			
			1996	1969	1995	1968-79	1980-89	1990-99	2000-02
81	2,064	5	118	114	89	53	58	71	48

Ortolan Buntings enjoyed their fifth-best year on record in Britain in 2002, which was somewhat remarkable given that there were just three birds in spring, the joint-lowest total since 1968. Of these three, one appeared at the Calf of Man on 2nd April, presumably an overshooting bird from southern Europe, while the other two were both on Fair Isle on 11th May, and seem most likely to have been displaced westwards while en route to Scandinavia. Autumn passage was, however, exceptional, with 78 birds recorded; only the 81 in autumn 1995 and 79 in autumn 1992 have surpassed this total. Autumn records were concentrated markedly in the southwest, with 65 (83%) in this region (fig. 11 on page 664). Totals included 26 on Scilly, 18 in Cornwall, ten in Dorset, nine in Pembrokeshire (including four on Skokholm on 13th September) and two in Devon. Away from the usual haunts, one on Benbecula, Western Isles, on 10th September, was especially noteworthy, being perhaps only the second ever for that recording area.

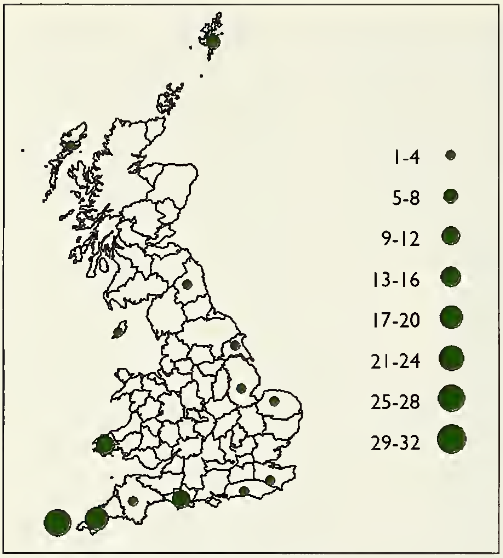

Fig. 11. Distribution of Ortolan Buntings *Emberiza hortulana* in Britain in 2002. Note the concentration of records in southwest England and west Wales, a bias which suggests that most birds in autumn 2002 were reverse migrants from southern Europe, with relatively few arriving from the northeast.

Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*

Number of individuals in 2002	Number of individuals in 1958-2002	Year rank	Highest annual maxima 1958-2002			Annual means 1958-2002				
			2000	1989	1993	1958-69	1970-79	1980-89	1990-99	2000-02
20	808	16	59	47	46	5	10	24	29	38

Twenty Little Buntings were recorded in Britain in 2002, all but three along the North Sea coast, with Shetland alone accounting for ten. There were three spring records: one on St Mary's on 25th-26th March, and two on Fair Isle, one from 30th April to 3rd May and the other from 8th-10th May. The first record of the autumn was one at Spurn on 19th September, but the main arrival was in mid October, with nine during 9th-18th. Away from Shetland, there were two in both Northumberland and East Yorkshire, singles in Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Orkney, and one on a North Sea oil-production platform in sea area Forties, on 29th October. Finally, a wintering bird found at Tideham Chase, Gloucestershire, on 28th November, remained into 2003 and continues the trend of such occurrences in the last few decades. Indeed, like Richard's Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae*, this species seems to have gained a small foothold as a wintering bird in Europe, far to the west of the traditional wintering grounds in northeast India and Southeast Asia. Some spring records, especially early ones, presumably relate to northbound migrants which have successfully wintered in the west. This species extended its breeding range westwards into Fennoscandia during the last century, but whether this expansion is connected to the fact that some birds are now also wintering farther west, most of which probably remain undetected, is unknown.

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Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank most sincerely the county and regional recorders and their assistants for providing such detailed information for 2002 and for supplying additional records for past years where appropriate. Without their ready co-operation, this report would not have been possible.

Peter A. Fraser and Michael J. Rogers, c/o 2 Churchtown Cottages, Towednack, St Ives,
Cornwall TR26 3AZ

Conservation research news

Compiled by Derek Gruar and Lennox Campbell

Diving gannets

Plunge-diving by gannets *Morus* is one of the most spectacular examples of specialist feeding by birds. Dives may commence from 30 m above, and reach depths of 30 m below, the water surface. To improve our understanding of the biomechanics of plunge-diving, Ropert-Coudert and his colleagues studied free-flying Cape Gannets *M. capensis* from three islands off South Africa. Birds trapped at or near the nest were fitted with rapid-sampling data-loggers which detect motion, and from which foraging and feeding behaviour can be inferred.

Their research showed that, although foraging trips could last as long as two days, the mean trip length was 14 hours. On average, an individual would plunge-dive 60 times during each foraging trip. Dive depth was surprisingly shallow, 9.7 m being the maximum recorded, only one-third of the maximum known for Northern Gannets *M. bassanus*. Although tail-mounted loggers recorded deceleration in a third of birds as they entered the water, no paddling or wing-flapping under water was detected, and it was concluded that the momentum of the dive alone was sufficient for birds to reach their maximum underwater depth. Three-quarters of birds showed a brief period of activity after a plunge, which may be explained by the capture of fish. They return passively to the surface, with the help of their natural buoyancy.

This study shows how the increasing availability and miniaturisation of technological aids such as data-loggers is providing ornithologists with the means to study aspects of behaviour and ecology which cannot be tackled by conventional techniques and direct observation.

Ropert-Coudert, Y., Gremillet, D., Ryan, P., Kato, A., Naito, Y., & le Maho, Y. 2004. Between air and water: the plunge dive of the Cape Gannet *Morus capensis*. *Ibis* 146: 281-290.

Finding your mate in a crowded colony

Just how do colonial species relocate their mates or their nest-sites when returning to a crowded colony? Recent research on the Common Guillemot *Uria aalge* and King Penguin *Aptenodytes patagonicus* examined the role of call structure in individual recognition within colonies, and the importance of acoustic recognition during the incubating and brooding periods (Lengagne *et al.* 2004). Both species nest in high-density colonies, do not build nests or hold a territory, and incubate their single egg on the ground or on their feet. Pairs spend little time together at the 'nest-site', as one parent forages for food while the other incubates the egg or broods the chick, yet must remain faithful. An effective means of mate relocation is, therefore, essential.

Behaviour and vocalisations during changeovers at both the egg and the chick stage were monitored, as were the responses to colour-marked neighbours and unmarked intruders. Analysis of call structures showed that, although there was sufficient between-individual variation in both species, and that each could make use of aural clues, the potential for individual recognitions was much greater in King Penguins. On returning to the colony, a King Penguin, probably using visual clues, moves silently to a preferred area and then starts calling until it receives a response from its mate. If no such calls are made, no changeover occurs and the incoming bird may even be attacked by its mate if it approaches too close. There have been no recorded instances of the residing bird initiating a first-contact call. Fidelity to the nest-site is low and no distinction is made between immediate neighbours or other intruders, all of which are met with hostility.

In Common Guillemots, the returning bird initiates 80% of first-contact calls during incubation, but the residing bird initiates *all* contacts during chick rearing. Silent changeovers may also occur and, as over 60% of returning birds land directly alongside their mate, recognition of topographical features may be just as important as vocalisation. Most guillemots nest within 2 m of the area they nested in the previous year and are clearly able to differentiate between neighbours and intruders. Returning neighbours were rarely met with hostile behaviour and were quickly accepted, but over 90% of intruders were repelled within a few seconds of landing. Preening of mates and neighbours is common and likely to facilitate neighbour recognition.

The different strategies adopted by these two species must largely reflect the situations in which they breed. In fluid colonies, where different nest-sites are used each year and topographical clues are of limited use, King Penguins must rely on vocalisations to locate their mates. Common Guillemots are able to locate their mates and identify neighbours without using vocalisations and appear to exploit the topographical variability of their nesting areas and familiarity gained from a high degree of site fidelity.

Lengagne, T., Harris, M. P., Wanless, S., & Slater, P. J. B. 2004. Finding your mate in a seabird colony: contrasting strategies of the Guillemot *Uria aalge* and King Penguin *Aptenodytes patagonicus*. *Bird Study* 51: 25-33.

Reducing the impact of disturbance on breeding European Golden Plovers

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW) and equivalent legislation in Scotland provide for increased access to large areas of the countryside. This has added to concerns about the effects that increasing levels of disturbance may have on wildlife populations. A recent paper (Finney *et al.* 2005) sets out the results of work over the last 13 years on a population of European Golden Plovers *Pluvialis apricaria* breeding close to a busy stretch of the Pennine Way in Derbyshire. During this period, the footpath through the study area was resurfaced in an attempt to reduce erosion. As a consequence, the proportion of walkers who strayed from the path fell from more than 30% to less than 4% once resurfacing was complete. This provided an opportunity to assess how the plovers responded to changes in the pattern and intensity of disturbance around the path.

Before the path was repaired, walkers attempting to avoid eroded areas caused widespread and unpredictable disturbance to moorland adjacent to the path, and during the chick-rearing period, European Golden Plovers tended to avoid areas within 200 m of the path, even on weekdays when overall disturbance levels were lower. After resurfacing of the path, the area avoided by the plovers fell to only 50 m and was evident only at weekends. Breeding performance (brood survival) was also assessed before and after the resurfacing work. Although brood survival was higher in areas with a more extensive cover of Crowberry *Empetrum nigrum*, there was no relationship with distance of the territory from the path.

These results demonstrate clearly that walkers straying from a defined route may reduce occupancy of moorland areas by European Golden Plovers. Although there was no evidence that this reduced brood survival, hatching success (which was not measured) may have been affected. This might be more important in areas with more predators than in this study area. Furthermore, this study demonstrates how relatively simple measures can, through subtle changes in visitor behaviour, reduce the human impact on birds significantly. While surfaced paths across open access areas as a whole may be inappropriate, encouraging access to strategically selected points that focus walkers onto obvious routes through such areas may achieve the same effect of reducing the area which the majority of walkers cover.

Finney, S. K., Pearce-Higgins, J. W., & Yalden, D. W. 2005. The effect of recreational disturbance on an upland breeding bird, the golden plover. *Biol Conserv.* 121: 53-63.

Letter

Taxonomic lists

As my letter (*Brit. Birds* 97: 302) was clearly not opposed to taxonomic lists *per se*, I am rather miffed that Martin Collinson should imply that I am some backwoodsman who might prefer to see birds listed alphabetically or by size. He did, however, use one word that I ought to have used – stability – and I am proud to stand alongside Mayr & Bock ('Provisional classifications versus standard avian sequences: heuristics and communication in ornithology', *Ibis* 136: 12-18), among others, on that point.

In fact, my attitude has been hardened by the news that 50-100 new phylogenetic studies of birds are published each year. Even Collinson admits that 'no-one would agree that the current order of the Western Palearctic list will ultimately be shown to be correct; there are many more changes that could be proposed'. What a prospect.

If such proposals are made, but not acted upon until a major re-think is fully researched, discussed and agreed, well and good, but scientists in all fields (including taxonomists) should occasionally be prepared to accept that, because something *can* be done, it is not necessarily a good idea to do it straightaway.

A. M. Macfarlane, 60 Holden Park Road, Southborough, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN4 0EP

Rarities Committee news

BBRC seeks new member

BBRC seeks a new member, preferably with knowledge of birds and birding in southwest Britain, to join the Committee on 1st April 2005. The prime qualifications required of candidates are:

- a widely acknowledged expertise in identification
- proven reliability in the field
- a track record of high-quality submissions of descriptions of scarce and rare birds to county records committees and BBRC
- considerable experience of record assessment
- the capacity to work quickly and efficiently, and handle the considerable volume of work involved in assessing upwards of 1,000 records per year
- easy access to and knowledge of IT
- regional credibility

BBRC's nominee is James Lidster, who lives in Dorset and is the Dorset County Recorder. James has birded extensively in Europe, North Africa and the Eastern Palearctic, and has also spent a season at Long Point Bird Observatory, in Canada. James is particularly interested in Palearctic migration and has studied likely vagrants at migration hot-spots in China and Mongolia. He is an enthusiastic sound-recordist and his expertise with bird calls would be a great asset to BBRC. Even though he enjoys extensive support from the birders of Dorset, Devon and Cornwall, the Committee would welcome any alternative nominees. Nominations should be sent to Colin Bradshaw, either by letter or by e-mail (drcolin.bradshaw@btinternet.com), before 10th January 2005, with details of a proposer and seconder, and the written agreement of the nominee. After this date, a voting slip and list of candidates with relevant details will be sent to all County Recorders and bird-observatory wardens.

The successful candidate will replace Doug Page, who has been a member of BBRC since 1995. Initially from the Doncaster area of South Yorkshire, Doug moved to Scilly a few years ago. He has combined extensive identification skills and wide-ranging knowledge of observers with a tolerance and sense of humour that most BBRC members struggle to retain by the end of their term of office. His combined interests of sport, music and beer will make him difficult to replace at the BBRC AGM, but he will doubtless be grateful that he no longer has to share rooms with members of a committee which includes some of the champion snorers in Britain. We wish him continued success in his career as the bird-finding postie of St Agnes.

ZEISS

The British Birds Rarities Committee is sponsored by Carl Zeiss Ltd.
Chairman: Colin Bradshaw, 9 Tynemouth Place, Tynemouth, Tyne & Wear NE30 4BJ
Secretary: M. J. Rogers, 2 Churchtown Cottages, Towednack, St Ives, Cornwall TR26 3AZ

Reviews

WEATHER AND BIRD BEHAVIOUR

By Norman Elkins. 3rd edition.
T & A D Poyser, A&C Black,
London, 2004. 280 pages;
colour photographs and black-and-white illustrations; maps,
tables and figures.
ISBN 0-7136-6825-3.
Hardback, £35.00.

This book, the definitive work on its subject, first appeared in 1983. Since then it has undergone several revisions, culminating in this fully revised third edition, now containing a useful series of colour photographs showing aspects of the weather and its effects on the behaviour of birds.

It is often said that the British are obsessed with the weather, and perhaps none more so than birdwatchers, especially those with a preference for observing migration or chasing after rarities. They will find much to interest them in this book, which begins with a clear and helpful summary of what the author calls 'the basic mechanics of atmospheric motion', followed by a chapter on different types of flight.

Elkins also devotes chapters to various different behaviours, including feeding, aerial feeding, breeding and comfort. This is followed by what was, for me, the most fascinating part of the book: chapters discussing the effects of weather on migration; vagrancy; extreme weather; and the group of birds which endures the greatest weather-related challenges of all – seabirds. Each chapter is copiously illustrated with evocative drawings from Alan Harris and the late Crispin Fisher and weather maps depicting specific examples. The latter, although occasionally a challenge to decipher, are nevertheless extremely useful.

I would take issue with the dust jacket, which describes the book as 'marvellously readable'. Elkins, as well as being a highly experienced birdwatcher, is a professional meteorologist, and members of his calling tend to use precise, formal language in order to differentiate between the often small differences in atmospheric conditions which can have such a profound effect on the weather itself. As a result, the book can be quite hard going in places, and it requires effort and concentration to get the most from its pages. Elkins does, however, provide clear summaries at the end of each chapter, which may tempt some readers to skip the preceding detail.

This brings me to my major reservation about this otherwise excellent book: the almost total lack of coverage of the effects of climate change, which is listed a mere six times in the index. While it may seem unfair to take issue with such an omission, I do believe that the overwhelming importance of climate change to the future of birds (and humans) means that it is essential to include the topic in any work covering the effects of the weather on birds. That aside, this book is a timely revision of the most authoritative guide to the ways in which the weather influences bird behaviour, and deserves a place on the bookshelf of anyone with an interest in the subject.

Stephen Moss

SHOREBIRDS: AN ILLUSTRATED BEHAVIOURAL ECOLOGY

By Jan van de Kam, Bruno Ens,
Theunis Piersma and Leo
Zwarts. KNNV Publishers,
Utrecht, 2004. 368 pages; 300
colour photographs.
ISBN 90-5011-192-0.
Hardback, 49.95.

This truly is a superb book, written by four authors whose names will be an immediate recommendation to all shorebird enthusiasts. Originally published in 1999, in Dutch, it is now available in an 'English updated edition', although it has to be said that, judging by the small number of additional references, the degree of updating is probably limited. But no matter, this is an extremely thorough and comprehensive review that will stand the test of time and be an essential item on the bookshelf of the shorebird enthusiast for many years to come.

As far as the species that are covered in detail are concerned, the range encompasses those that occur in the Waddenzee, The Netherlands, which has been the focus of the authors' studies. Though other species of waterbirds are also discussed (Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*, Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*, wildfowl, gulls (Laridae) and terns (Sternidae), the major consideration belongs with the shorebirds which frequent the Waddenzee. Although this book is written from a European perspective, with an emphasis on European species, the overall interest and appeal is worldwide.

The six main chapters describe the tidal areas used by the waterbirds, review the waterbirds and their characteristics, discuss migration, food and feeding (even the effects of predation by waterbirds on their prey), breeding strategies, and the likely conditions that waterbirds will have to face in the future. In all, a comprehensive and thorough survey. There are numerous diagrams illustrating practically all the topics discussed, but, without doubt, the book is greatly enhanced by Jan van de Kam's photographs. These not only portray the birds themselves, but also many aspects of their behaviour. All the illustrations, photos and diagrams alike are enormously enhanced by the informative captions.

Is there anything missing? Well, if there is, it probably means that you will have to go out and do the research yourself! And the bottom line? An outstanding book; if you are a wader buff, get a copy now! Even if waders are not your thing, you will still learn a lot; so borrow a copy from the library (and you may end up buying one anyway).

Richard Chandler

SEABIRD POPULATIONS OF BRITAIN AND IRELAND: RESULTS OF THE 'SEABIRD 2000' CENSUS 1998-2002

By P. Ian Mitchell, Norman Ratcliffe and Stephen Newton.
Christopher Helm, A&C Black, London, 2004. 511 pages; colour photographs; line-drawings; maps.
ISBN 0-7136-6901-2.
Hardback, £35.00.

Ornithologists are often accused of being obsessed with counting things. I used to get real flak for this from an old girlfriend: the caring 'What are you off counting today, darling?'; the unsympathetic 'How difficult can it really be?'; and the sneering 'What is the point?!'. These were frequent questions I faced when leaving the house for a day's fieldwork. Well, the point is that it may be very important for scientific, conservation or economic reasons to know just how many individuals there might be in any given population, and it is actually quite difficult to count a flock of more than a few hundred individuals, as anyone who has attempted this will testify. Imagine then the effort and logistical nightmare that was *Seabird 2000*, where researchers and fieldworkers from all around the country endeavoured to visit virtually every seabird colony in Britain & Ireland in order to count/estimate/extrapolate the population sizes of all the seabird species that regularly breed here.

Earlier this year, the much-awaited results from this truly Herculean effort appeared, in *Seabird Populations of Britain and Ireland*. More than five pages of acknowledgments bear witness to the amount of work that has gone into this monumental project. Data were collected over five years instead of the planned four (owing to the restrictions caused by foot-and-mouth disease), and we now have the output from the third survey in a highly successful series of national seabird population censuses. This new book retains much of the format laid down in the two earlier publications. There are comprehensive accounts covering each of the 25 breeding seabird species. Each account contains details of the census methods used, along with an interpretation of current status and trends. Most results are presented in an international context; and most accounts investigate the factors underlying any change in numbers. The last couple of chapters set the species accounts in a wider, more general perspective, with excellent reviews outlining the presumed causes of seabird population changes, and the significance of British and Irish seabird populations in an international context. The addition of colour plates and maps makes this book much easier on the eye than the two earlier publications, but if I have any real gripe, it is that the quality of the illustrations, particularly those on the dust jacket, is not quite up to the standard set in the previous *Status of Seabirds in Britain and Ireland*, which presented the findings of the 1985-87 survey.

But perhaps the most significant differences between *Seabird Populations of Britain and Ireland* and the earlier publications come in terms of the number of colonies surveyed and the amount of information provided. For example, *Seabird 2000* covered inland gull and tern colonies, which were not included in previous surveys. Furthermore, although the tables are presented in the familiar format and style found in *The Status of Seabirds in Britain and Ireland*, those in the new book generally contain much more detail on the geographic areas surveyed and incorporate percentage changes since the two earlier surveys. Without doubt, however, the most impressive results are presented in the three chapters discussing the shearwaters (Procellariidae) and storm-petrels (Hydrobatidae). The burrow-nesting habits of these species make them notoriously difficult to survey, and simply locating all the colonies, let alone estimating the numbers breeding there, is a mammoth task. One of the major objectives of *Seabird 2000* was to address these problems and, using the latest survey techniques, this census has provided the first meaningful national estimates of small-petrel and shearwater populations and distributions, which is a remarkable achievement.

This book will undoubtedly become *the* authority for information about seabird populations in Britain & Ireland for the next ten years, and I would encourage anyone working on seabirds in this region, whether scientist, conservationist, manager or enthusiastic amateur, to go out and buy it. Ironically, its publication coincided with the catastrophic breeding failure of several seabird species in the North Sea in summer 2004, and such events underline just how important reference books like this really are.

Stuart Bearhop

A BIRD IN THE BUSH: A SOCIAL HISTORY OF BIRDWATCHING

By Stephen Moss. Aurum Press,
London, 2004. 375 pages;
28 black-and-white
photographs.
ISBN 1-85410-993-6.
Hardback, £16.99.

I enjoy good books about the history of whatever we decide to call our great obsession – birding, birdwatching, ornithology, or some combination of all three. I think I first became hooked about 40 years ago, when Dr Ian Pennie told me about his researches into the founding fathers of Scottish ornithology. At some point after that came James Fisher's brilliant *The Shell Bird Book*. There have been numerous published accounts since, most notable in recent years being, perhaps, the excellent trilogy from the Mearns team. So what of this new review by Stephen Moss?

I read it over three days, as time permitted, and was fascinated by it. In short, it is a very good read, and it will give you a pretty fair impression of how things have developed since the author's chosen starting point with Gilbert White. He has clearly enjoyed his task and researched it well, as the acknowledgments and bibliography show. I hope lots of birdwatchers read the book; perhaps the lively accounts of the current scene may even persuade them to buy a copy.

Having said all that, I found it a slightly frustrating book in some ways – but not because I disagree with its treatment particularly, or because of nitpicking about this or that personality or event. Essentially, I suppose, I wish it was twice as long! I would have enjoyed more detail on ornithology in the nineteenth century, along with (largely because I was there) more stories and more characters from the 1950s, '60s and '70s. There is a familiarity about many of the birding and twitching stories of the modern era. It would have been good to hear some new ones, and also to have seen the history given a more even geographical spread. I can imagine birders in some parts of the UK feeling they are hardly part of the tale at all.

When all is said and done, though, a book of this sort, dwelling as it does on the social history of birdwatching, is bound to be selective and, to some extent, subjective as well. Bear this in mind when reading it, and I think you will enjoy it – and value it – as much as I did.

Mike Everett

DVD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF BRITAIN & EUROPE

By Paul Doherty. Bird Images,
Sherburn-in-Elmet, 2004.
Six DVDs,
12 hours 35 minutes.
£45.00.

Paul Doherty is renowned for producing high-quality videos of species ranging from raptors, warblers and gulls, to eastern rarities and common garden birds. This project is a showcase for his best work to date. The foundation for this six-DVD set was laid down several years ago, when Paul produced a series of four videos of the same name, covering 550 species. This new production, on super-sharp DVD medium, completely updates the original and provides accounts of a further 100 species. The result is a truly impressive collection of great video clips, backed up by colour photographs and an expert commentary. The exact geographical area covered is not defined, but footage includes a comprehensive selection of species from North Africa and the Canary Islands.

Almost every European breeding species, winter visitor and regular passage migrant is included; the only obvious exceptions are Rock Partridge *Alectoris graeca* and Spanish Imperial Eagle *Aquila adalberti*, for which suitable video footage was not available. A good scattering of the most frequently occurring vagrants are also covered, along with a small number of species yet to been recorded within Europe; these include Plain Martin *Riparia paludicola*, Mourning Wheatear *Oenanthe lugens* and Arabian Warbler *Sylvia leucomelaena*.

Treatment of each species follows a standard format, commencing with a still image, after which about a minute of video is played. The excellent commentary is timed to draw attention to important plumage features shown in each clip. Freeze-frame technology is frequently used to compare similar species, and reference is made to characteristics that are sometimes noticed in the field but often ignored by field guides. For example, the footage of Northern Goshawks *Accipiter gentilis* in display flight clearly shows the characteristic fluffed-out undertail-coverts and comparatively slow wingbeats. I have yet to find a field guide that describes this to my satisfaction – but the DVD representation of this behaviour is spot on. Furthermore, the DVDs are able to convey 'jizz' in a way that books just cannot. In some cases, songs are also included on the DVD track because the bird was singing when being filmed, but often the only sound is that of the background. This can be played without the commentary if preferred.

For me, the most impressive commentaries accompanied video sequences of various distinctive forms and recently split species. For example, Great Grey *Lanius excubitor* and Southern Grey Shrikes *L. meridionalis*, including the distinctive Central Asian form of the latter, *L. m. pallidirostris*, are discussed in full, as are the two races of Isabelline Shrike *L. isabellinus*: 'Turkestan Shrike' *L. i. phoenicuroides* and 'Daurian Shrike' *L. i. isabellinus*. Similar treatment is afforded to Arctic *Carduelis hornemanni*, Common *C. flammea* and Lesser Redpolls *C. cabaret*, and the various forms of Yellow-legged *Larus cachinnans* and Lesser Black-backed Gulls *L. fuscus*. Some recently suggested splits, for example of Eastern Olivaceous *Hippolais pallida*, Orphean *Sylvia hortensis* and Marmora's Warblers *S. sarda*, have not been treated in similar depth. This will, hopefully, be rectified in a future edition.

Niggles are very few and far between. Although the range of each species is described briefly, I would recommend the inclusion of distribution maps in any future revision. In addition, the only printed form of index is a list of each family for each DVD, although a copy of the full species list can be downloaded from Paul Doherty's website at www.birdvideodvd.com.

Keith Betton

DRAWING BIRDS

By John Busby. 2nd edition.
Christopher Helm, A&C Black,
London, 2004. 144 pages;
80 colour and 50 black-and-white illustrations.
ISBN 0-7136-6816-4.
Paperback, £19.99.

The first time I saw the work of John Busby was on the cover of *Birds* in 1973, and it had a profound effect on me. It was a subtle study of Barn Owls *Tyto alba* that appeared to break all the rules of wildlife art – where was all the plumage detail, and what was all that smudgy charcoal doing there, adorning the cover of such a prestigious journal? The penny dropped: it was simply an honest piece of field observation and I was completely sold on it! The public reaction to this and similar cover artworks was incredible. Letters flowed to the editor of *Birds*, with 'disgusted of St Alban's' and others reacting to the use of such awful scribbles on the cover as a waste of RSPB members' subscriptions. Such comments appear quaint today when set against the wealth of modern wildlife art available, but are they? Read the letters page of a recent issue of *Birds Illustrated* – some people never learn.

The RSPB, to their credit, stuck to their guns and continued to use the cover of *Birds* as a forum for new and exciting talent. This continued philosophy also led to them publishing *Drawing Birds* in 1986 – copies are like gold dust today. And now, through Christopher Helm (and endorsed by the RSPB), you have the chance to own the second edition. If you missed out first time round, do not miss the second opportunity to admire this book. But, describing it as a second edition is a bit like saying *The Two Towers* is a second edition of *The Fellowship of the Ring*! It is best defined as *Drawing Birds* Vol. 2; let's hope it becomes a trilogy.

The purpose of this book is to guide you through the process of observing and collecting bird images. John Busby's own words capture this perfectly: 'Draw anything and you will know it better than before, even if the drawing is not up to much. You also begin to realise that your eyes are giving you varying information all the time. What you see after three minutes' drawing will be quite different from your immediate impressions, and from your understanding half an hour later, when your eyes have travelled over, through and around your subject many times.' The texts will take you through and convey the whole process from understanding bird anatomy, to drawing in the field, to putting birds into the landscape and turning your sketches into paintings, prints or even sculptures.

But it is not just John's eloquent, jargon-free approach to writing that makes this book so enjoyable. It is also his graceful drawing style, which illustrates many of the techniques he describes. With the additional talents of 30 other artists, you are treated to a Who's Who of the world's finest field painters. The pages are full of beautiful images that could only have come straight from the bird to the eye and then onto the page. I have room to name only a few of my favourites: John Busby's shimmering study of *Bathing Kittiwakes* (*Rissa tridactyla*), Lars Jonsson's beautiful treatment of light in *Sundrenched European Wigeon* (*Anas penelope*) and James McCallum's fidgety *Reed Buntings* (*Emberiza schoeniclus*). Make your own choices, virtually all of the 144 pages are packed with artwork of the highest calibre and if you think it's just a selection of paintings from the 'Eric Ennion sketch club', look again and you will find Ian Lewington's delightful studies of primary projections and bill lengths.

You may have noticed that I am a huge fan of this book! But because it is so important and inspiring on many levels, it has universal appeal, reaching those who love wildlife art, those who simply want be able to make more of their notebooks, and the most dedicated and committed artists. All power to Helm, for championing the cause of wildlife art as a true art form. It is not just about pretty pictures for chocolate boxes and calendars as some areas of the 'serious' artworld would have it – just look at Kim Atkinson's monoprint *Maize stubble – Autumn*. And the cover…! (Although it could have been in hardback…)

Dan Powell

News and comment

Compiled by Adrian Pitches

Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of *British Birds*

New flagship RSPB reserve receives huge council grant

In one of the poorest wards in northeast England, the local council has voted for wildlife to drive regeneration and has awarded £450,000 to the new 400-ha Saltholme reserve taking shape on the north bank of the River Tees. The total cost of this flagship RSPB reserve will be £5.7m; so far, a third of the cost (£1.9m) has been secured. Stockton Council's grant will go towards the cost of the Wild Bird Discovery Centre, billed as potentially the largest wildlife-related visitor attraction in the northeast, which it is hoped will pull in an estimated 100,000 visitors each year within a decade. This would make it the largest RSPB visitor facility in the UK and would be a major boost to the only region of England without an RSPB reserve open to visitors. Working in partnership with the Teesside Environmental Trust, the Society is undertaking the largest wetland recreation project in the north of England as new lakes, reedbeds and grasslands are constructed on an old landfill site and redundant ICI farmland near Billingham.

The new wetland complex should hopefully attract breeding Eurasian Bitterns *Botaurus stellaris*, Marsh Harriers *Circus aeruginosus* and Bearded Tits *Panurus biarmicus* to a region where none of these species nests at present. Work began in the autumn of 2002 but the reserve will not open to the public until 2007 as the project team has only a narrow window of opportunity in which to work on site. The existing Saltholme Pools are significant for both breeding *and* wintering waders and wildfowl, so disturbance is being limited to the period from late July to late October. For the rest of the year, fundraising is the imperative. If the money is found, and this major wildlife/tourism attraction welcomes its first visitors in 2007, it will be just 20 years since the 'International Nature Reserve' was first proposed by the now-defunct Teesside Development Corporation. The new project is now a far grander proposition; with further land acquisitions linking existing protected areas around Teesmouth, the new reserve will form almost half of a 1,000-ha regional nature park, stretching from Hartlepool to the River Tees, a mouthwatering prospect that will have been worth the 20-year wait.

43% of Europe's birds are in trouble

Sharp declines in the populations of formerly common birds... This is a familiar story to British birdwatchers, but the latest report from BirdLife shows that it is a European-wide phenomenon. *Birds in Europe*, published in November, on the 25th anniversary of the EU Birds Directive, revealed that 226 species of birds – some 43% of those occurring regularly in Europe – are facing an uncertain future. Some are now so threatened that they may disappear from parts of Europe in the very near future.

The new study spans the whole of Europe from Greenland to Georgia and from the Canary Islands to Russia. It is an assessment of population sizes and trends for all of Europe's wild birds from 52 European countries or territories. In the 10 years since the publication of BirdLife's original European study, the populations of 45 bird species have declined and now have an unfavourable conservation status. Many waders, such as Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* and Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*, have declined largely because of drainage of lowland river valleys and upland habitat. Migratory birds wintering in sub-Saharan Africa, including House Martin *Delichon urbicum*, Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* and Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*, together with farmland birds such as Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*, have also declined. In the urban landscape, Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* and House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* have suffered right across Europe, not just in the UK.

The report is not all bad news, however, and improved protection measures, partly as a result of the EU Birds Directive, have led to increases in Griffon Vultures *Gyps fulvus*, White-tailed Eagles *Haliaeetus albicilla* and Audouin's Gulls *Larus audouinii*. Clairie Papazoglou, BirdLife's Head of EU Policy, said: 'The European Union has promised to halt the loss of wildlife in Europe by 2010. The latest *Birds in Europe* assessment highlights the sheer enormity of that task. The third assessment, already planned for ten years' time, will reveal to the world whether the EU has kept its word or broken its promise.'

Link: BirdLife (www.birdlife.org).

Good news for sparrows and starlings

There is also some good news for the House Sparrow, a species whose numbers have halved in the UK over the past 25 years or so, to around six million pairs. The Government has announced that House Sparrow and Common Starling are to be removed from the general licence that enables perceived 'pest' species to be controlled for the purposes of preventing damage to crops or the spread of disease. Ben Bradshaw, Minister for Nature Conservation, said: 'I have been keen for some time to halt the dramatic decline of the House Sparrow, particularly in the south and southeast of England. The consultation process of the review of the general list has just been completed, and I think the time is now right to put work in hand to restore the dwindling populations of the House Sparrow and Starling. It is my view that both these birds should be removed from the general list to afford them greater protection.'

Even though BTO-led research has found that the shooting of House Sparrows was playing only a minimal role in their decline, this news is still extremely welcome. Mike Toms, co-ordinator of the current BTO House Sparrow Survey said: 'We are delighted by this news, not least because it sends a very positive message that the Department of the Environment is fully behind efforts to reverse the decline of this once-common species.'

Farmland birds have had their chips

Changes in farming practices have certainly had a big impact on bird populations, with the growing of autumn-sown cereals and the resultant loss of winter stubbles being a major culprit. So any glimmer of good news from out in the field(s) is welcome. N&c picked up the following ray of hope from Ian (D. I. M.) Wallace who is describing recent events at his local patch, in East Staffordshire: 'With only distant memories of a few migrant chats perched on Essex potatoes (back when there were lots of birds), I viewed the late spring planting of soft "McCain-type" spuds at a patch hot-spot with alarm, as there would be even less stubble for autumn searches. Come mid September 2004, however, and the waterlogged tramlines in the crop were hatching insects galore. Meadow Pipits *Anthus pratensis* needed no second invitation and by mid October they had notched up a maximum flock of 350. Even when the plant tops were flailed to improve drying, the birds' feast did not lessen and chief among ten other species attracted to the field were two Lapland Buntings *Calcarius lapponicus* which arrived with Sky Larks *Alauda arvensis*.' Ian is now praying that the final 'lift' is profitable and that there will be more potatoes – and birds – in 2005.

Blast off for Atlas IV

Clear your diary – it's Atlas time again! The BTO, the Scottish Ornithologists' Club and BirdWatch Ireland have announced plans for the next Atlas project, fieldwork for which will take place between 2007 and 2011. The new Distribution Atlas will be a ground-breaking combined winter and breeding atlas, which marks a major departure from the breeding atlases of 1968-72 and 1988-91 and the winter atlas of 1981-84. Writing in *BTO News* No. 254, Rob Fuller and Graham Appleton explained why the new project will be a combined breeding and winter atlas: 'There are several reasons for this. Winter distributions are just as important in conservation terms as breeding ones. Whilst the breeding season is a critical time of year for all birds, many species are limited by factors affecting overwinter survival. Furthermore, climate change may be having particularly pronounced, but currently unmeasured, effects on wintering distributions of many species.'

Clearly, a combined atlas is a monumental task for fieldworkers. The BTO calculates that, if 20,000 birdwatchers across Britain & Ireland spend an average of four days a year on survey work, then the job will get done – and the notional monetary value of that combined effort will be nearly £50m! The actual cost of the Atlas project in administration, analysis and compilation will be more than £1m, of which £550,000 has already been found. An appeal to help find the remainder will be launched in 2006. Previous Atlas fieldworkers will be pressed into service for the 2007-11 surveys – an enjoyable and satisfying task all will agree – but a new generation of Atlas workers will also need to be recruited. Ask not what your country's birds can do for you, but what you can do for your country's birds…

News & comment Christmas competition

There's a copy of the all-new Christopher Helm guide *Gulls of Europe, Asia and North America*, by Klaus Malling Olsen & Hans Larsson, to be won for correct answers to the following questions:

- Which well-known British ornithologist was a comic-strip hero in the 1970s?
- And in which publication did the strip appear?

Answers via post or e-mail to the N&c address inside the front cover of this journal. The draw will take place on Christmas Day, and the winner and solution will be revealed in the New Year. If there are no all-correct answers, the answer to the first question alone may suffice to win you the prize. Don't forget to include your name, address and *BB* subscriber number, found on the mailing slip with your issue.

Plan submitted for world's biggest windfarm

Plans to build the world's biggest onshore windfarm were submitted in early November. The 234-turbine development on Lewis, in the Western Isles, would generate enough electricity to supply 450,000 homes – around 1.1 million people, or one in five Scots. Opponents of windfarms are particularly alarmed at the potential threat that the forest of whirling rotor blades poses to large birds of prey on Lewis, particularly nesting Golden Eagles *Aquila chrysaetos*, not to mention White-tailed Eagles wandering north from their breeding cliffs on the Inner Hebrides.

The developers are Lewis Wind Power, a joint venture between nuclear generator British Energy and engineering firm AMEC. They say that the turbines would meet around 6% of the UK's renewable energy target and cut CO_2 emissions by 1.85 million tonnes per annum, compared with coal-fired power stations. They also estimate that the 702 MW windfarm (which would produce half the output of a medium-sized coal-fired power station) could generate up to £8m per year for the Western Isles economy, with 300 jobs created during the four-year construction period and a further 350 jobs over its 25-year lifetime. David Hodkinson, a director of Lewis Wind Power, said that there would be no damage to wildlife or landscape: 'We firmly believe the Lewis Windfarm would play a vital role in the development of the Western Isles as Europe's leading centre for renewable energy, at the same time as helping Scotland and the UK meet their respective renewable energy targets. We acknowledge there are concerns about the impacts of the proposal on birds and on the landscape of north Lewis and have worked hard, including commissioning the largest bird survey ever undertaken in Europe, in developing the design to minimise these impacts.' The Scottish Executive will make its decision on the windfarm plans in 2005.

Cage bird extravaganza cancelled

Animal welfare campaigners are claiming victory after the biggest annual exhibition of exotic birds in Britain, The National Cage & Aviary Bird Exhibition, was cancelled. Animal Aid claimed that this was a direct result of legal advice issued to the Royal Agricultural Society of England (RASE), who were due to host the event at Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire, on 4th-5th December. A spokesman for the animal welfare group confirmed that it had reported RASE – a registered charity – to the Charity Commission, who then warned the organisers that they could be at risk of prosecution. Animal Aid claimed that the sale of pet animals in public places was prohibited on welfare grounds under The Pet Animals Act, 1951, and the Charity Commission confirmed that they had written to the Society suggesting that 'you seek professional advice and make sure you are not contravening any law'.

The event, organised by IPC Media, had previously been held at the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham, and has been condemned by numerous animal protection organisations in the past. Animal Aid welcomed the cancellation, saying that many of the 100,000 birds for sale at the event would have been 'torn' from the wild. Campaigner Toni Vernelli said: 'The RASE's decision to ban this controversial bird market is a huge step forward for animal welfare. We hope it signals the beginning of the end for the brutal exotic bird industry, which is driving many species to the brink of extinction and causing untold suffering to hundreds of thousands of birds every year.'

Swan killers jailed on Malta

The illegal activities of hunters on Malta routinely outrage conservationists. But this was a wildlife crime that made headlines across Europe and – nearly three years later – the perpetrators have finally been punished. Two hunters were jailed (one for six months and the other for three) and a third fined 500 Maltese pounds for shooting and killing three Mute Swans *Cygnus olor* from a speedboat in St Thomas' Bay, Marsascala, in January 2002 (*Brit. Birds* 95: 147). The magistrate also ordered that an 18-month suspended jail term that had previously been handed down to one of the thugs be put into effect, bringing his jail term to a total of 21 months. The hunters had been charged on 13 separate counts, ranging from carrying loaded shotguns at St Thomas' Bay, where hunting is prohibited, to conspiring to take away protected species. The magistrate ordered the confiscation of the shotguns and speedboat belonging to the hunters, and banned all three men from being granted a hunting licence for five years.

Link: Times of Malta (www.timesofmalta.com).

BirdLife and hunters sign the pledge

Meanwhile, BirdLife and FACE (the Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation of the EU) have signed an historic agreement recognising that the conservation of bird species and their habitats is a common objective. Both organisations agree that the Birds Directive is the appropriate instrument for bird conservation in the EU, and undertake not to attempt to change it. Both recognise the importance of the Natura 2000 network, which includes all the Special Protection Areas for birds required under the Birds Directive. They also agree to co-operate in promoting strategic conservation priorities, such as halting biodiversity decline by 2010, protecting sites, and reforming the Common Agricultural Policy.

The Agreement, signed on 12th October by BirdLife Chief Executive Mike Rands and Gilbert de Turckheim, President of FACE, was welcomed and countersigned by Margot Wallström, European Commissioner for the Environment.

SCOPAC on track

The modern birder is faced with an overwhelming array of books, optics and gadgets, all designed to help us squeeze the utmost from our hobby. But for those who use a telescope mounted on a tripod, here is a simple but (potentially) revolutionary accessory. The SCOPAC is an inherently simple design that converts most tripods from an unwieldy hindrance into a convenient backpack. By attaching two legs of the tripod to the SCOPAC, the tripod becomes the frame of the backpack, which has a central pocket ideal for a field guide or a field snack. They make for an excellent Christmas present for the birder who has everything (else), and who is keen to stop those neck- and shoulder-aches ruining a long day in the field. For more information, visit their website: www.scopac.co.uk or telephone: 07810 560916.

Requests

Northern Bullfinches

Many readers will already be aware that there is a record invasion of Bullfinches *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* of the large nominate race taking place at the moment. Birds began arriving in Shetland on 10th October and by the end of the month they had certainly reached as far as the Western Isles and Ireland. A paper on this influx is being compiled for publication in *BB* and we would like to appeal for information to be sent to bullfinch@pennington.charitydays.co.uk. We are interested in:

- counts and sightings in Britain, especially systematic data, but including unidentified Bullfinches at unusual locations which may be immigrants;
- counts of sexes to allow calculation of sex ratios in different areas and at different times;
- data from ringed birds, including age and sex;
- records or summaries of information from any other countries affected by the invasion;
- informed comment on the origins of the invasion and/or the unusual calls given by many individuals.

All records will be passed to the relevant County Recorder, where appropriate.

Mike Pennington, Shetland,
and Eric Meek, Orkney

Colour-ringed Waxwings

The numbers of Waxwings *Bombycilla garrulus* arriving in Scotland this autumn suggest that we might be seeing one of the largest invasions ever recorded. By the end of October, flocks were appearing all over the northern half of the country, many containing several hundred birds. One incredible flock in Forres (Moray) was estimated to contain up to 1,500 birds, perhaps the largest single flock ever to be seen in Britain.

More than 100 Waxwings were individually colour-ringed in Scotland in late October, so please check all Waxwings for colour rings. Interesting movements have already been recorded this autumn, with a bird ringed in Stornoway (Western Isles) being retrapped ten days later, 290 km to the southeast, near Aberdeen. Another bird, ringed in Shetland, was retrapped near Aberdeen the following weekend.

All colour-ringed Waxwing sightings will be gratefully received; please e-mail details to: raymond@waxwing.fsnet.co.uk. An acknowledgment with full history of the bird and an update of the project results will be sent to you.

Raymond Duncan, Aberdeen

Redwings

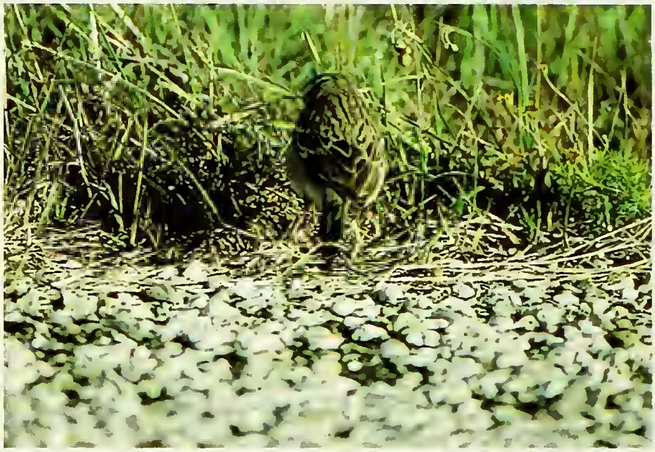
There was an unprecedented movement of Redwings *Turdus iliacus*, in terms of both scale and direction, through northwest England on 9th-10th October 2004. Preliminary information indicates that a minimum of 120,000 moved east through Lancashire and Cheshire on the morning of the 9th.

We are presently gathering data about this event for future publication and would appreciate any records of Redwings in Britain, or farther afield, during the period 8th-12th October, if possible with details of timing, flight direction and any associated species. If you normally see large numbers of Redwings in early October and there was a conspicuous absence of birds this year, please let us know as such information would also be useful. All assistance will be acknowledged.

Please send details by e-mail to JeanRbrts6@aol.com or by post to Seaforth Nature Reserve, Port of Liverpool L21 1JD.

Jean Roberts and Steve White, Lancashire

Photo no. 209: Lark Sparrow

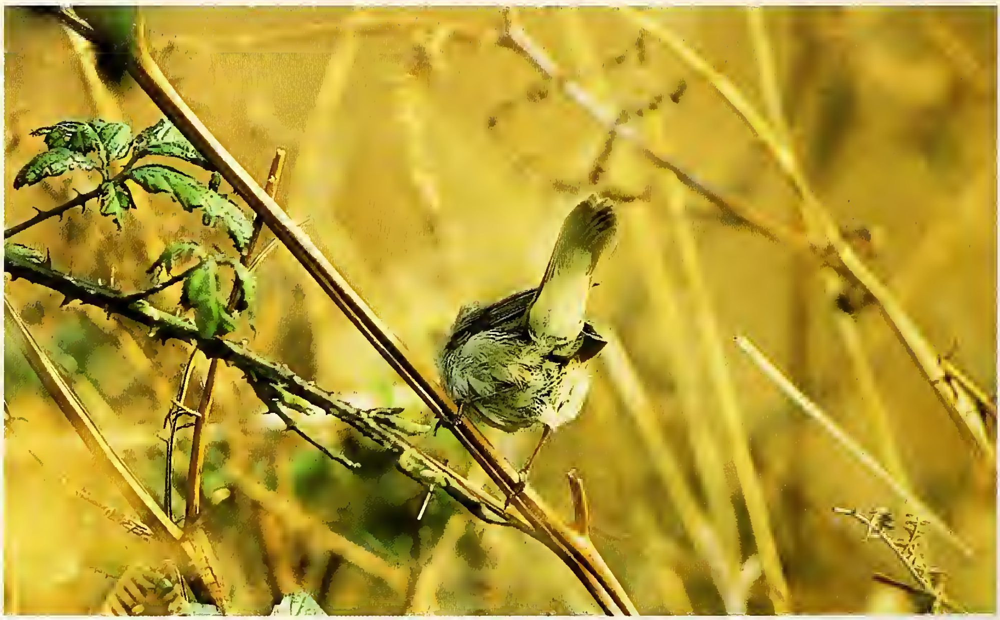


380. Lark Sparrow *Chondestes grammacus*, Texas, USA, April 1992.

When I first saw Monthly Marathon photo number 209 in print (*Brit. Birds* 97: plate 265, repeated here as plate 380), I wasn't quite sure what to make of it, but as I wasn't expecting to have to write the solution, I didn't devote much thought to the problem. There was a time when I would have been so hooked by such a challenge that I would not have put the magazine away until I had at least determined a shortlist of possible candidates, but these days there is such a surfeit of interesting ornithological material awaiting my attention that it is all too easy to postpone such minor distractions. I confess that I might never have come back to this particular photograph had I not been asked to write a solution, since the one submitted by one of my SUNBIRD colleagues was, alas, incorrect! With renewed interest, I agreed to have a closer look at it, and write a solution if I felt I could identify the bird correctly.

This was an interesting experience because, on the basis of a preliminary view, I really had no firm idea as to what family the bird belonged, let alone what species! All I had deduced from the initial perusal was that it looked like something with which I was *not* very familiar, and I suspected one of the North American sparrows (Emberizidae), with which I have had only limited contact in recent years. When it comes to solving the identity of birds in mystery photographs, knowing what they are *not* can be at least as important as knowing what they might be!

Before pursuing the American sparrow line, I decided that I needed to be really certain that this was not just a tricky picture of one of the more familiar European



381. 'Monthly Marathon'. Photo no. 212. Tenth stage in thirteenth 'Marathon'. Identify the species. Read the rules (see page 54), then send in your answer on a postcard to Monthly Marathon, c/o The Banks, Mountfield, Robertsbridge, East Sussex TN32 5JY, or by e-mail to editor@britishbirds.co.uk, to arrive by 31st January 2005.

species that had flashed through my mind when I first looked at the photograph. After all, certain features (especially, perhaps, what looks like a white patch on the primary coverts?) did vaguely suggest Wood Lark *Lullula arborea* or even a Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*, to name but two. A Wood Lark viewed from this angle would show obviously broader tertials with pale wedge-like markings along their shafts, not the plain dark-centred and light-fringed tertials displayed by the mystery bird. Furthermore, a Wood Lark would not show the narrow double wing-bars of the bird in the photograph, while the supercilia would meet in a point at the back of the head. A Whinchat would have dark legs (they are light flesh-coloured on the mystery bird), a warmer-coloured rump and bolder upperpart streaking.

So, being drawn ever more surely to the Emberizidae, what makes it an American sparrow rather than one of the Eurasian buntings? Almost all the buntings differ from the American sparrows in the pattern of the tertials; buntings have a pale fringe to the longer two tertials which is of uneven width, being broadest distally and giving way to a widening of the dark centre toward the base of these feathers. On our mystery bird, the rather narrow pale fringing to the tertials, of even width, suggests an American sparrow rather than any bunting, but which one? This is a good point at which to remind ourselves that only a handful of North American sparrows have been recorded in the Western Palearctic, as the Monthly Marathon series does not feature any species not recorded in the region. This means we need only consider the following species: Eastern Towhee *Pipilo erythrophthalmus*, Lark Sparrow *Chondestes grammacus*, Savannah Sparrow *Passerculus sandwichensis*, Fox Sparrow *Passerella iliaca*, Song Sparrow *Melospiza melodia*, White-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia leucophrys*, White-throated Sparrow *Z. albicollis* and Dark-eyed Junco *Junco hyemalis*. The suggestion of rather bold, blackish lateral crown-stripes, a prominent whitish supercilium and the apparently unmarked flank may have led some participants to immediately narrow the choice down to the two *Zonotrichia* species, both of which can show this combination of field marks. But what about that prominent whitish spot in the vicinity of the primary coverts (which, initially, may have prompted thoughts of Wood Lark)? Neither White-crowned nor White-throated Sparrow seems to show this feature, but one of the other species on our shortlist *does* have a pale spot at the base of the outer primaries, and it too has bold head markings and plain flanks. Could this rather drab and unimpressive passerine really be a Lark Sparrow, surely one of the most attractive of all the North American sparrows? The more you look at it, the more likely it seems that this is indeed the solution. In fact, if you look really closely at the heavily-in-shadow left side of the bird's head, it is just about possible to discern a prominent pale spot in the upper-rear corner of the ear-coverts and some sort of pale spot just below the eye. I guess I'm going to put my money on Lark Sparrow!

Killian Mullarney

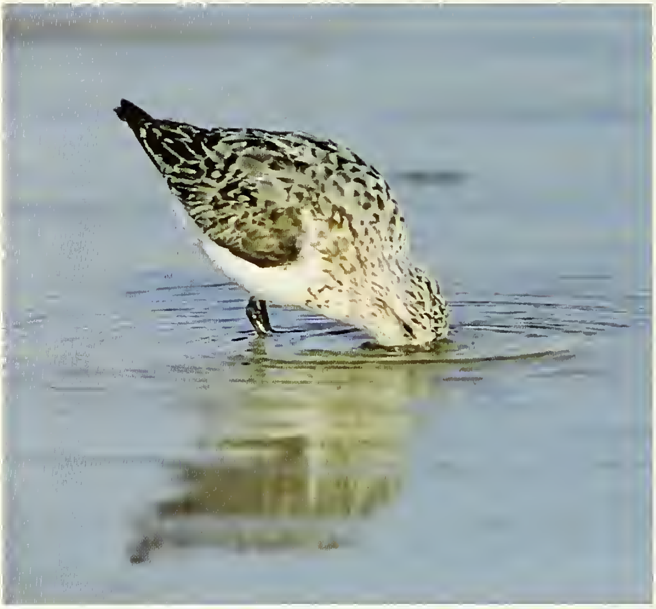
Lark Sparrow was indeed the correct answer, this one being photographed in Texas, in April 1992. As the solution above testifies, it was one of the less-straightforward photos in the series, and the proportion of entrants who came up with the right answer (45%) was smaller than normal. Of the more popular incorrect answers, two of the species have been mentioned above by Killian (Wood Lark and White-crowned Sparrow), although in addition there was a school of thought which took Black-throated Accentor *Prunella atrogularis* as the likely solution.

Eds

Photo no. 210: Sanderling

All but the most novice of birders would probably look at Monthly Marathon photo number 210 (*Brit. Birds* 97: plate 266, repeated here as plate 382) and think 'small peep' *Calidris*. The compact, chunky nature of the bird in the photograph leaves little other option, and the black legs immediately rule out several species in that group. As always with waders, it is worth ageing the bird first, and from the mix of old and new feathers in the mantle and scapulars we can immediately tell that this bird is an adult. The pinky-rufous cast to the head and breast are a shadow of its breeding plumage and, as the fresh feathers in the mantle are the grey winter plumage, we can conclude that it is an autumn bird moulting out of breeding and into non-breeding plumage. The bird's comparatively short-winged appearance and overall compactness suggest one of three closely related species, Little Stint *Calidris minuta*, Semi-palmated Sandpiper *C. pusilla* or Red-necked Stint *C. ruficollis*, and the warm wash to the head and neck might suggest the last species in this list. It is at this point that we normally start to examine feather patterns in greater detail to confirm or negate our suspicions. But hold on! A bit of lateral thought, relevant previous experience, or awareness of pitfalls might just be appropriate here…

In 1981, I led my first SUNBIRD tour to Mongolia, and having flown in to a remote lake in the Gobi Desert, Tatsain Tsagan Nor, we quickly pitched our tents and walked down to the shore to start birding. As expected, there were waders present and the first group we looked at were obviously


Olaf Lessow

382. Sanderling *Calidris alba*, Spain, September 1999.

Red-necked Stints in a mixture of plumages. I set the 'scope up on the birds and immediately noticed a tiny Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* with the group – and then another small Terek ran into view. Alarm bells rang and, with some embarrassment, I reidentified the Red-necked Stints as Sanderlings *C. alba*! Seeing a species which is so strongly associated with coastal sandy beaches so far from the ocean and out of context can easily lead to such mistakes. The following year, an adult peep in worn breeding plumage was found on Fair Isle, Shetland. The record was duly submitted to BBRC as Britain & Ireland's first Red-necked Stint and was accepted unanimously on its first circulation. Several committee members asked that it should be sent to an independent expert to confirm the identification, as this plumage was poorly known. The record was sent to Lars Jonsson, who had been researching stints for his forthcoming paper on the group (*Brit. Birds* 77: 293-315). His response stunned committee members, together with all those involved with the record – it was a Sanderling! And so is our mystery bird! Peter Grant summarised the main features of the Fair Isle bird that separated it from Red-necked Stint in his paper entitled 'Four problem stints' (*Brit. Birds* 79: 609-621). Most of them can be seen in our mystery photograph too and the main ones are as follows:

1) The breeding-plumaged mantle and scapular feathers are strongly chequered black-and-white (Red-necked Stint has white-fringed upperparts feathers in fresh summer plumage, but these fringes quickly disappear through wear; in moderately worn summer plumage the upperparts of Red-necked Stint are strongly rufous-fringed).
2) The marks on the side of the breast of our bird form wavy bars (in Red-necked Stint these marks are sharp streaks or arrowhead-shaped marks). In addition, these markings look brown and have some rufous tones around them (in Red-necked Stint they are black and the background colour to this area is white).
3) Several scapulars and tertials on our bird show white marks within the feathers (breeding-season scapulars and tertials on Red-necked Stint are solidly dark-centred).

Our bird is, therefore, an adult Sanderling in late summer/autumn, moulting from breeding plumage into winter plumage.

David Fisher

The responses received from contestants suggested that this Sanderling, photographed in Spain in September 1999, was a more straightforward puzzle than the Lark Sparrow, with 72% naming it correctly. Interestingly, there were no votes for Red-necked Stint, and the majority of the incorrect answers were for Semipalmated Sandpiper.

Eds

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Recent reports

Compiled by Barry Nightingale and Anthony McGeehan

This summary of unchecked reports covers mid September to mid November 2004.

Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors* Ythan Estuary (Northeast Scotland), 8th-9th October. **Redhead** *Aythya americana* Kenfig Pool (Glamorgan), 13th October to 10th November; Barra (Western Isles), 8th November. **Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca* Brockholes Quarry (Lancashire), 12th-17th September; Leighton Moss (Lancashire), 15th-25th October; Welney (Norfolk), 1st November. **Lesser Scaup** *Aythya affinis* Sandbach (Cheshire), 3rd-7th October. **King Eider** *Somateria spectabilis* Trondra (Shetland), 16th October; Cat Firth (Shetland), 18th October; Peterhead (Northeast Scotland), 30th October to 4th November; Maidens (Ayr), 31st October.

Albatross sp. (Diomedeidae) One flew past Sheringham and Great Yarmouth (both Norfolk), 10th October.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* East Chevington (Northumberland), 3rd October to 9th November. **Purple Heron** *Ardea purpurea* Mersea Island (Essex), 15th September to 3rd October; Dungeness (Kent), 30th September; Walberswick (Suffolk), 10th October. **Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra* Walland Marsh, 16th-17th September, same, St Margaret's-at-Cliffe area (both Kent), 19th September. **Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus*, Tacumshin (Co. Wexford), 28th-31st October.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans* Christchurch Harbour (Dorset), 12th September; Monks Wood (Cambridgeshire), 13th-14th September; Minsmere (Suffolk), 7th-8th October. **Pallid Harrier** *Circus macrourus* Scilly (Bryher, Tresco, St Martin's and St Agnes), 10th-14th September; Castle Hill (East Sussex), 12th September; Trondra, 24th-26th September, presumed same Bressay (both Shetland), 1st October.

Little Crake *Porzana parva* Marazion Marsh (Cornwall), 1st-10th November.

Cream-coloured Courser *Cursorius cursor* St Agnes, 28th-29th September, same St Martin's, 29th September to 8th October, same St Mary's (all Scilly), 8th-26th October; taken into care,

Iain Leach

383. Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*, East Chevington, Northumberland, October 2004.

Hugh Harrop

384. Juvenile Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*, Trondra, Shetland, September 2004.

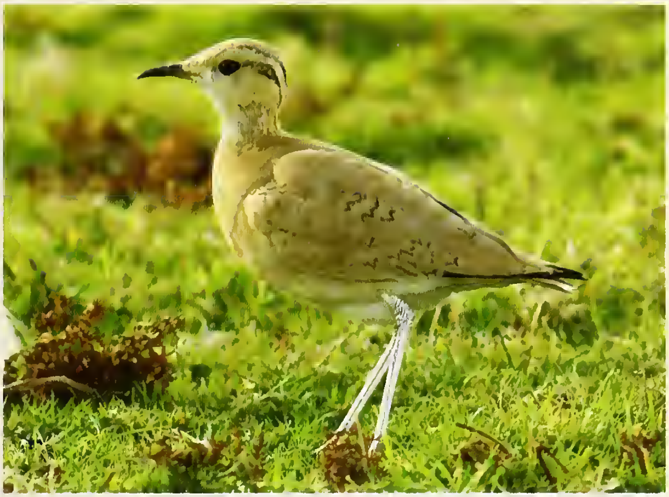
died overnight 27th/28th October. **American Golden Plover** *Pluvialis dominica* Tiree (Argyll), 13th-14th September; Coll (Argyll), 20th-21st September; Sanna Bay (Highland), 20th September; Fetlar (Shetland), 20th September to 20th October; South Uist (Western Isles), 25th September to 24th October; Papa Westray (Orkney), 27th September; Nosterfield (North Yorkshire), 3rd October; Steart Point (Somerset), 4th October; Benbecula (Western Isles), 7th-9th October; Alaw Estuary (Anglesey), 8th October; Noss Head (Highland), 16th October; Lurgan Green (Co. Louth), 17th-24th October; Royston (Cambridgeshire), 22nd October; Ythan Estuary, 23rd-27th October; Bann Estuary (Co. Derry), 25th-29th October; Annagh (Co. Mayo), 5th November. **Pacific Golden Plover** *Pluvialis fulva* Fidwell Fen (Cambridgeshire), 30th October to 2nd November.

Paul Hackett

385. Little Crake *Porzana parva* Marazion Marsh, Cornwall, November 2004.

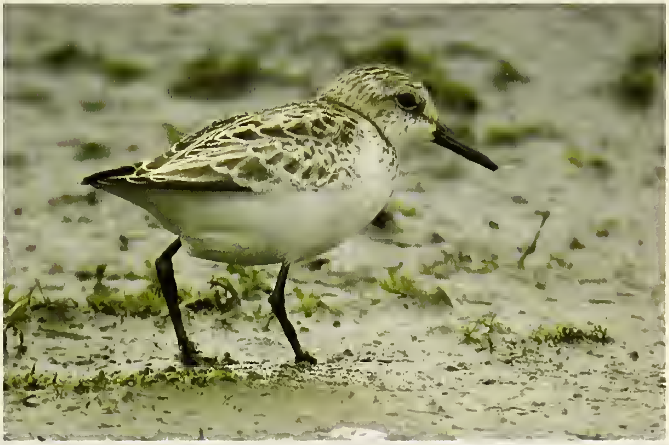
Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla* Drift Reservoir (Cornwall), 17th-23rd September. **Western Sandpiper** *Calidris mauri* Brownsea Island (Dorset), 29th September to 15th October. **White-rumped Sandpiper** *Calidris fuscicollis* Minsmere, 18th-19th September, 13th-24th October; Cley/Salthouse (Norfolk), 20th September; Harris (Western Isles), 20th September; Hickling Broad (Norfolk), 23rd-25th September; Slimbridge (Gloucestershire), 4th October. **Baird's Sandpiper** *Calidris bairdii* Titchwell (Norfolk), 15th September; Minsmere, 19th September to 7th October; Bardsey (Gwynedd), 20th September; Coll, 21st September; Buckenham Marshes (Norfolk), 21st-25th September; Stithians Reservoir (Cornwall), 24th-28th September; Lewis (Western Isles), 26th September; Flamborough (East Yorkshire), 27th September to 3rd October; North Uist (Western Isles), 15th-24th October; South Uist, 24th October. **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** *Tryngites subruficollis* Berneray (Western Isles), 15th September; Tiree, 15th-16th September; Sennen, 15th September, possibly same Nanjizal (both Cornwall), 16th September; St Agnes, 19th September, same St Martin's, 21st September, same St Mary's, 20th-22nd September, with up to three there between 23rd September and 6th October; North Uist, 19th September; Lewis, 20th September; Ythan Estuary, up to two between 24th September and 5th October; South Uist, up to two between 25th September and 11th October; Fetlar, 1st-3rd October; Grove Ferry (Kent), 2nd-23rd October; South Ronaldsay (Orkney), 2nd-6th October, with two on 10th-11th October.

Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus* North Bull Island (Co. Dublin), 31st October to 4th November. **Long-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus scolopaceus* Spurn/Easington (East Yorkshire), 14th-16th October. **Lesser Yellowlegs** *Tringa flavipes* Stiffkey Fen (Norfolk), 14th-24th September, and 10th October to 10th November; Rutland Water (Leicestershire), 25th September to 4th October; Drift Reservoir (Cornwall), 25th September to 5th October; Shaw's Lake (Co. Armagh), 20th October; St Mary's, 1st-9th November. **Spotted Sandpiper** *Actitis macularius* Portballintrae (Co. Antrim), 13th-16th October. **Red-necked Phalarope** *Phalaropus lobatus* Lodmoor (Dorset), 11th-12th September and 5th October; Pearson's Flash (Greater Manchester), 11th-13th September; Llandegffed Reservoir (Gwent), 12th-16th September; Saltfleet (Lincolnshire), 15th-16th September; Kelling (Norfolk), 23rd-25th September; Staines Reservoir (Surrey), 24th September; Filey (North Yorkshire), 4th October.



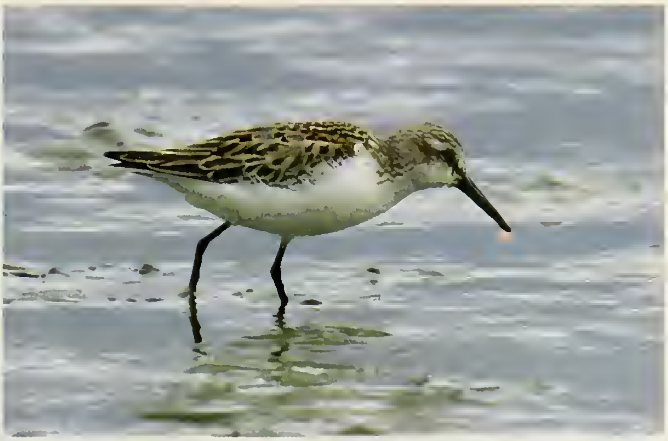
Steve Young/Birdwatch

386. Cream-coloured Courser *Cursorius cursor*, St Mary's, Scilly, October 2004.



Roy Harvey

387. Juvenile Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla*, Drift Reservoir, Cornwall, September 2004.



Mike Malpass

388. Juvenile Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri*, Brownsea Island, Dorset, October 2004.

Alan Tate

389. Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus*, Bawdsey, Suffolk, October 2004.

Bonaparte's Gull *Larus philadelphia* Thurso (Highland), 12th September to 2nd October; Garretstown (Co. Cork), 15th October. **Slender-billed Gull** *Larus genei* Portland (Dorset), 4th October. **Forster's Tern** *Sterna forsteri* Carlingford Lough (Co. Down/Co. Louth), 13th-15th October; presumed same, Ballyholme (Co. Down), 7th November. **White-winged Black Tern** *Chlidonias leucopterus* Spurn, 11th September; Titchfield Haven (Hampshire), 26th September; Covenham Reservoir (Lincolnshire), 1st-8th October.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus americanus* St Mary's, 7th October. **Snowy Owl** *Bubo scandiacus* South Uist, 22nd October to 7th November.

Alpine Swift *Apus melba* Barnes Wetland Centre (Greater London), 17th October. **Pallid Swift** *Apus pallidus* Southwold (Suffolk), 21st September; Filey, 22nd-23rd September; St Margaret's-at-Cliffe, 15th October; Sizewell (Suffolk), 15th October; Walmer (Kent), 17th October; Loftus (Cleveland), 20th October; Spurn, 20th-21st October, with another on 29th October; Cley/Blakeney Point, four on 20th October; Bawdsey (Suffolk), 21st October; Skegness (Lincolnshire), 23rd October; Dungeness, 28th October; two at Cley, then Blakeney Point, then Wells-next-the-Sea on 29th October, with two different ones at Sheringham the same day, and possibly one of the same at Salthouse (Norfolk), 30th October; Weir Wood Reservoir (West Sussex), 29th October; Land's End (Cornwall), 30th October; Portland, 30th October; Alum Bay (Isle of Wight), 30th October; St Mary's, 30th October, same St Agnes, 30th-31st October; Newburgh (North-east Scotland), 31st October to 1st November; St Leven (Cornwall), 4th November.

Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra* Spurn, 3rd October. **Tree Swallow** *Tachycineta bicolor* Wick (Dorset), 31st October. **Olive-backed Pipit** *Anthus hodgsoni* Spurn, 10th-11th October; Flamborough Head, 16th October; Cruden Bay

Rebecca Nason

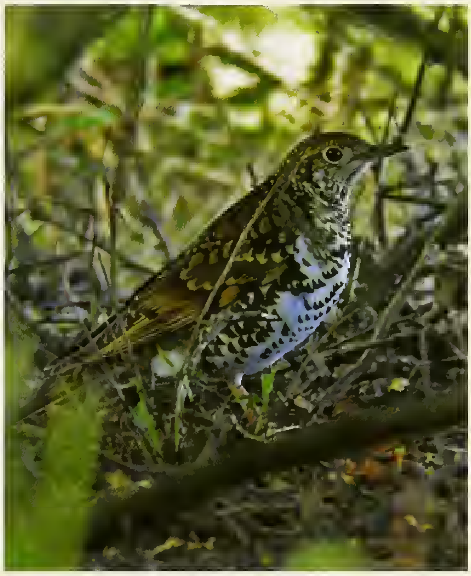
390. First-winter Rufous-tailed Robin *Luscinia sibilans*, Fair Isle, Shetland, October 2004.

(Northeast Scotland), 17th October; Fair Isle (Shetland), 20th October; St Agnes, 24th October; St Mary's, 25th October; Saltfleet, 28th October; Land's End, 29th October; Porthgwarra (Cornwall), 2nd-4th November. **Pechora Pipit** *Anthus gustavi* Foula (Shetland), 5th-9th October, two on 10th-12th October, one remaining to 20th October. **Red-throated Pipit** *Anthus cervinus* Reskajeage Down (Cornwall), 27th September; Kinsale (Co. Cork), 16th October; Cape Clear (Co. Cork), 16th October; Sheringham, 17th-18th October. **Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola* Tingwall (Shetland), 13th September; Whalsay (Shetland), 21st-29th September; Foula, 7th October.

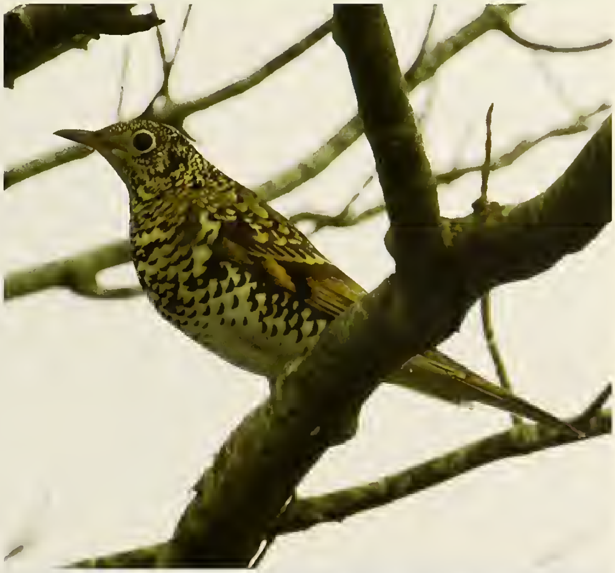
Waxwing *Bombycilla garrulus* Major influx during latter part of October, mainly in Scotland, including: 200-300 in Shetland 19th; 200 Lewis, 22nd, with 250 there 28th-30th; 150 Fair Isle 24th; 150 Kinloss (Moray), 80 Lochinver and 150 Dunvegan Castle, Skye (both Highland), 27th; 200 Golspie (Highland), 28th-30th; 800 Ullapool and 250 Inverness (both Highland) 29th; 280 Forres (Moray), 29th, with 1,170 there 30th-31st; 200 Culloden (Highland) and 200 Kemnay (Northeast Scotland), 30th; 200 Aberdeen (Northeast Scotland), 30th October to 2nd November; 200 Inverurie (Northeast Scotland), 30th-31st; 200 Kirkwall (Orkney), 31st. Smaller flocks reached East Anglia and as far west as Scilly and Ireland by the end of October.

In early November, 1,020 Inverness and 100 Overstrand (Norfolk), 2nd; 200 Kinross (Perth & Kinross), 3rd-5th; 200 Ballater (Northeast Scotland), 4th; 255 Dunblane (Forth) and 200 Currie (Lothian), 5th; 400 Stirling (Forth), 230 Balerno (Lothian), 220 Bridge of Don (Northeast Scotland) and 100 Burniston (North Yorkshire) 6th; 200 Dundee (Angus), 300 Glasgow (Clyde), 250 Edinburgh (Lothian), 400 Westhill and 300 Inverurie (both Northeast Scotland), 7th.

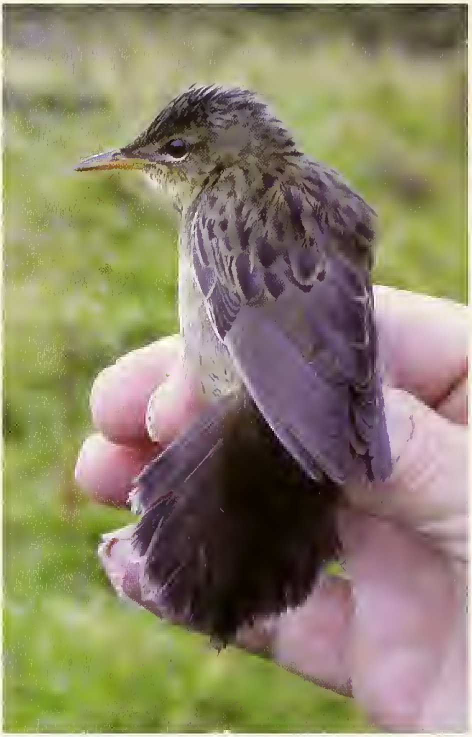
Rufous-tailed Robin *Luscinia sibilans* Fair Isle, 23rd October. **Red-flanked Bluetail** *Tarsiger cyanurus* Fair Isle, 29th September. **Isabelline Wheatear** *Oenanthe isabellina* Sumburgh (Shetland), 22nd-25th October. **Pied Wheatear** *Oenanthe pleschanka* Whalsay, 10th October; Newbiggin (Northumberland), 20th-25th October; Scousburgh (Shetland), 23rd October. **Desert Wheatear** *Oenanthe deserti* Walpole Bay (Kent), 3rd November. **White's Thrush** *Zoothera dauma* Out Skerries (Shetland), 1st October; Voe (Shetland), 2nd October; Maywick (Shetland), 6th October (taken into care, released 7th October); Easington, 10th October; Swining (Shetland), 10th-20th October;


Paul Hackett

391. White's Thrush *Zoothera dauma*, Easington, East Yorkshire, October 2004.

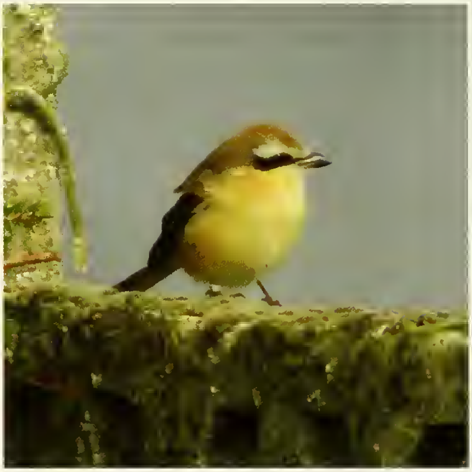

Hugh Harrop

392. White's Thrush *Zoothera dauma*, Swining, Shetland, October 2004.



Tony & Helen Mainwood

393. Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella certhiola*, Foula, Shetland, October 2004.

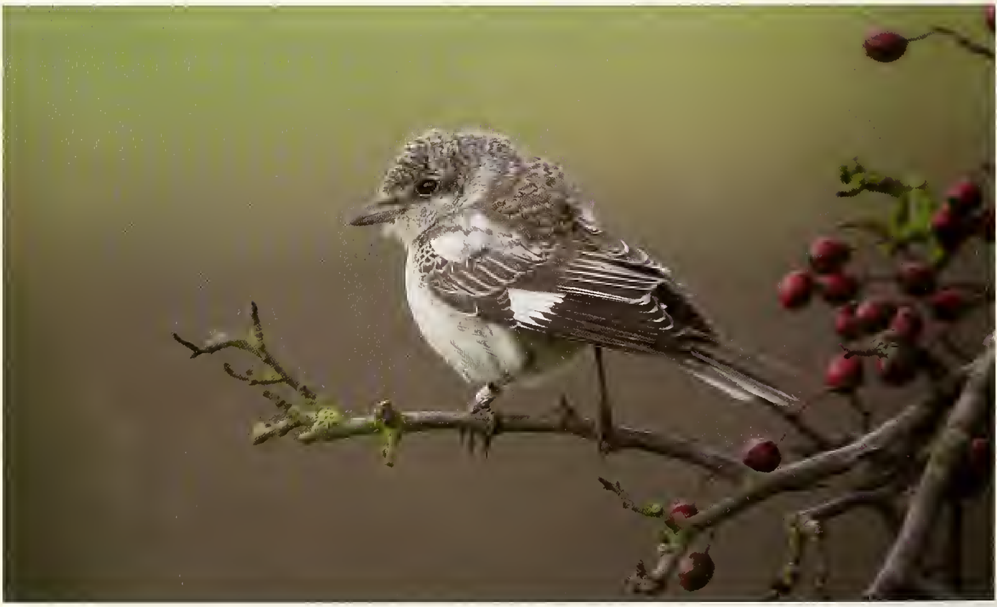


Hugh Harrop

394. Adult male Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*, Whalsay, Shetland, September 2004.

Lewis, 11th-12th October. **Swainson's Thrush** *Catharus ustulatus* Gugh (Scilly), 26th October. **'Black-throated Thrush'** *Turdus ruficollis atrogularis* Westpoint Lake (Staffordshire), 15th October.

Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella certhiola* Foula, two, 1st October with one to 2nd October, when joined by a third, one or other remaining to 5th October; Pool of Virkie (Shetland), 6th-7th October. **Lanceolated Warbler** *Locustella lanceolata* Fair Isle, 4th October; Bressay, 26th October. **Paddyfield Warbler** *Acrocephalus agricola* Sennen, 14th October. **Blyth's Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus dumetorum* Foula, 2nd-7th October; Barra, 8th-9th October; Unst (Shetland), 15th October; Tynemouth (Northumberland), 20th-21st October. **Booted Warbler** *Hippolais caligata* Unst, 20th-21st Sep-



Dave Stewart

395. Juvenile Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus*, Kilrenny, Fife, November 2004.

tember; Fair Isle, 5th October.

Stuart Piner

396. Yellow Warbler *Dendroica petechia*, Barra, Western Isles, October 2004.

Asian Desert Warbler *Sylvia nana* Caister (Norfolk), 22nd October. **Subalpine Warbler** *Sylvia cantillans* Pagham Harbour (West Sussex), 26th October. **Sardinian Warbler** *Sylvia melanocephala* Winterton (Norfolk), 15th-26th October. **Greenish Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochiloides* The Naze (Essex), 12th-13th September; Bawdsey, 15th-16th September. **Arctic Warbler** *Phylloscopus borealis* The Naze, 5th-7th October; Bryher, 8th October. **Pallas's Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus proregulus* An influx was apparent from 10th October, with arrivals at Spurn, Southwold, and Warham Greens (Norfolk). At least another five were seen on 11th and three on 12th, then about 40 during 14th-21st October, including five at Holkham (Norfolk), on 16th October. A further 40-50 were reported by the end of October. **Hume's Warbler** *Phylloscopus humei* Cove Bay (Northeast Scotland), 17th-22nd October; Holy Island (Northumberland), 20th October. **Radde's Warbler** *Phylloscopus schwarzi* Farne Islands (Northumberland), 30th September; St Mary's, 11th-14th October; St Martin's, 13th-14th October; Flamborough, 16th October; Weybourne (Norfolk), 17th October; Landguard (Suffolk), 27th October. **Dusky Warbler** *Phylloscopus fuscatus* Minnis Bay (Kent), 9th October; Hengistbury Head (Dorset), 11th October; Bawdsey, 11th October; Fair Isle, 13th and 18th-19th October; Blakeney Point, 20th October; Walsey Hills (Norfolk), 20th-27th October; Landguard, 20th October to 4th November; Scarborough (North Yorkshire), 22nd-27th October; Eccles (Suffolk), 23rd October; South Uist, 25th October; Barrow-in-Furness (Cumbria), 29th October to 1st November; Winterton, 29th-30th October; Church Norton (West Sussex), 30th October; Collieston (Northeast Scotland), 31st October to 1st November; Pegwell Bay (Kent), 1st-2nd November, with two on 3rd, one remaining to 4th; Tresco, 2nd November; Walpole Bay, 3rd November. **Western Bonelli's Warbler** *Phylloscopus bonelli* St Agnes, 30th September to 1st October; Holkham, 13th-14th October; Mizen Head (Co. Cork), 28th-31st October; South Ronaldsay, 29th-31st October.

Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla* Dungeness, 28th October. **Brown Shrike** *Lanius cristatus* Whalsay (Shetland), 19th-24th September. **Isabelline Shrike** *Lanius isabellinus* Vidlin (Shetland), 17th October. **Lesser Grey Shrike** *Lanius minor* Newburgh, 31st October. **Woodchat Shrike** *Lanius senator* Skomer (Pembrokeshire), 11th-12th October. **Masked Shrike** *Lanius nubicus* Kilrenny (Fife), 29th October to 10th November.

Lee Gregory

397. Ovenbird *Seiurus aurocapilla*, St Mary's, Scilly, October 2004

Tony & Helen Mainwood

398. First-winter male Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas*, Foula, Shetland, October 2004.

Rose-coloured Starling *Sturnus roseus* A total of at least 19, including seven which arrived between 26th September and 1st October. Nine were in southern and western English counties, with five in Scotland. **Red-eyed Vireo** *Vireo olivaceus* Marsden Quarry (Co. Durham), 27th October; Toe Head (Co. Cork), 30th October. **Arctic Redpoll** *Carduelis hornemanni* Foula, 29th September to 9th October; Unst, 9th-18th October with at least one other 10th-15th; Lewis, 11th-12th October; South Uist, 11th October; Yell (Shetland), 15th October; Tiree, 23rd October.

Pine Grosbeak *Pinicola enucleator* Easington, 10th November. **Bullfinch** *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* A record invasion of the nominate race, 'Northern Bullfinch', occurred, chiefly in Shetland, beginning on 10th October, with at least 100 there each day during 15th-17th, then around 465 on 18th, including at least 115 on Unst and 100 on Fair Isle. Another surge was reported in Shetland towards the end of October, including 115 on 25th and 110 on 26th.

Yellow Warbler *Dendroica petechia* Barra, 2nd-8th October. **Blackpoll Warbler** *Dendroica striata* Lundy (Devon), 2nd October. **Ovenbird** *Seiurus aurocapilla* St Mary's, 25th-28th October, when taken into care, died later. **Common Yellowthroat** *Geothlypis trichas* Foula, 9th-10th October; Maywick (Shetland), 14th October.

Chestnut-eared Bunting *Emberiza fucata* Fair Isle, 14th-20th October. **Yellow-breasted Bunting** *Emberiza aureola* Spey Bay (Moray), 20th September; Toab (Shetland), 1st-2nd October.

Rebecca Nason

399. First-winter Chestnut-eared Bunting *Emberiza fucata*, Fair Isle, Shetland, October 2004.

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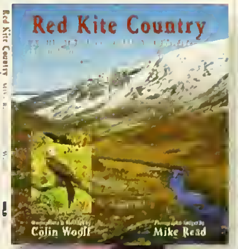

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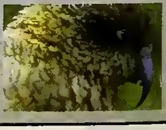

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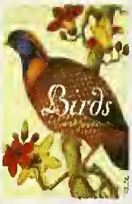

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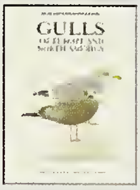

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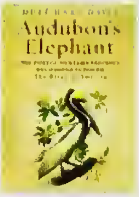

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